

STATE POWER
in
ANCIENT
CHINA & ROME

Edited by
WALTER SCHEIDEL



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STATE POWER IN ANCIENT CHINA AND ROME

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Contributors

PETER FIBIGER BANG is associate professor of history at the Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen, and holds a doctorate from the University of Cambridge. He is a Roman historian interested in comparative and world history. From 2005 to 2009 he was chair of the European research network Tributary Empires Compared, funded by COST (<http://tec.saxo.ku.dk>), and he has been a visiting professor at the Universities of Tübingen and Heidelberg. Among his publications are *The Roman Bazaar: A Comparative Study of Trade and Markets in a Tributary Empire* and the coedited volumes *Tributary Empires in Global History* (with Chris Bayly), *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (with Dariusz Kolodziejczyk), and *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (with Walter Scheidel).

T. COREY BRENNAN is associate professor of classics at Rutgers University–New Brunswick; he also taught at Bryn Mawr College. Brennan was appointed Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the American Academy in Rome, 2009–12. His books are *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic* and (coedited with Harriet I. Flower) *East and West: Papers in Ancient History Presented to Glen W. Bowersock*. He has written many contributions on Roman history and culture, including a comparative study of Rome and Chang'an in Michael Loewe and Michael Nylan, eds., *China's Early Empires: A Re-Appraisal*.

PETER EICH is professor of Roman history and historical anthropology at the Albert-Ludwigs-University of Freiburg. He specializes in the history of Roman administration and is the author of *Zur Metamorphose des politischen Systems in der römischen Kaiserzeit: Die Entstehung einer "personalen Bürokratie" im langen dritten Jahrhundert* and coeditor of *Der wiederkehrende Leviathan: Staatlichkeit und Staatswerdung in Spätantike und Früher Neuzeit*. He is currently working on a book on the political theology of the later Roman Empire.

MARK EDWARD LEWIS is Kwoh-Ting Li Professor in Chinese Culture at Stanford University. He specializes in the history of ancient China and is the author

of *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, *The Construction of Space in Early China*, and *The Flood Myths of Early China*. He has completed a series of three books on the history of early Chinese empires, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han*, *Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties*, and *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty*. He is currently completing a volume entitled *Emotional Communities in Early China*.

CARLOS NOREÑA is associate professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley. His work focuses on the political and cultural history of the Roman Empire. He is the author of *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West*, which examined the figure of the emperor as a unifying symbol for the western Roman Empire, and coeditor of *The Emperor and Rome: Space, Representation, and Ritual* (with Björn Ewald), which explored the impact of monarchy on Rome's cityscape. He has also written on material and visual culture in the Roman Empire, the topography and urban history of the city of Rome, and comparative empires. His current research studies the relationship between ecology, state power, culture, and social order in the Roman Empire.

MICHAEL PUETT is the Walter C. Klein Professor of Chinese History in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. He is the author of *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* and *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China*, as well as the coauthor, with Adam Seligman, Robert Weller, and Bennett Simon, of *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*.

WALTER SCHEIDEL is Dickason Professor in the Humanities and professor of classics and history at Stanford University. His research focuses on ancient social and economic history, premodern historical demography, and comparative and transdisciplinary world history. He has authored or (co)edited fourteen other books including *Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire*, *Death on the Nile: Disease and the Demography of Roman Egypt*, *Debating Roman Demography*, *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (with Ian Morris and Richard Saller), *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires*, *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (with Ian Morris), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies* (with Alessandro Barchiesi), *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (with Peter Bang), and *Fiscal Regimes and the Political Economy of Premodern States* (with Andrew Monson).

KAREN TURNER is Distinguished Professor of the Humanities and professor of history at the College of the Holy Cross and a senior scholar in the East Asian Legal Studies Program at Harvard Law School. Her work focuses on comparative law, Chinese legal history, Vietnamese history, law and human rights in Asia, and women and war. Her publications include *Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam* (1998) and *The Limits of the Rule of Law in China*

(2000), as well as numerous articles on comparative legal history, women and war, and women veterans in Vietnam. She produced and directed the documentary film *Hidden Warriors: Voices from the Ho Chi Minh Trail* and has published a book in Chinese on American views of Chinese legal history.

DINGXIN ZHAO is professor of sociology at the University of Chicago. His research covers the areas of social movements, nationalism, historical sociology, and economic development. Zhao's publications have appeared in journals such as *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *Sociology*, *Mobilization*, *China Quarterly*, and *Problems of Post-Communism*. He has published a book in English entitled *Power of Tiananmen* and three books in Chinese (*Social and Political Movements*, *Eastern Zhou Warfare and the Rise of the Confucian-Legalist State*, and *The Limit of Democracy*). His new book entitled *The Rise of the Confucian-Legalist State and Its Legacies in Chinese History* will be published by Oxford University Press.

Chronology

CHINA

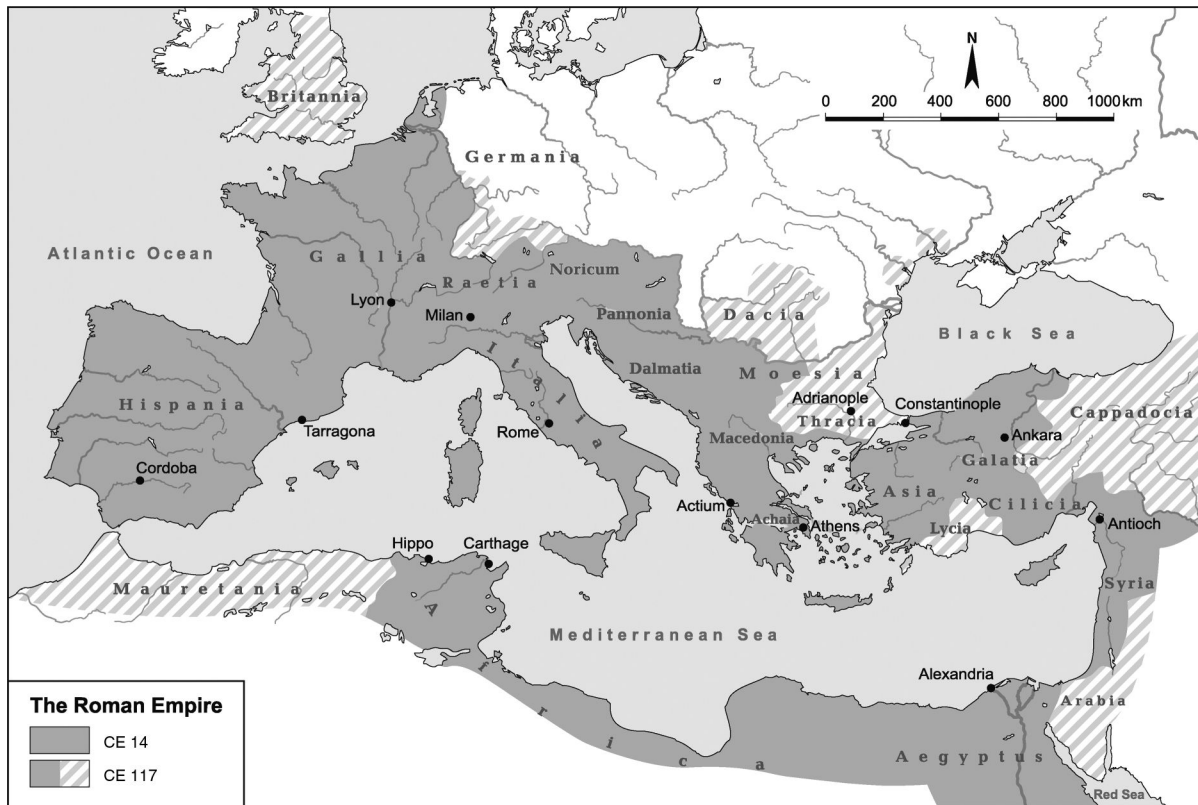
c.1600–c.1045 BCE	Shang Dynasty
c.1045–771 BCE	Western Zhou Dynasty
897 BCE	Enfeoffment of Qin Ying (conventional date)
770–256 BCE	Eastern Zhou Dynasty
770–481 BCE	Spring and Autumn Period
770 BCE	Ennoblement of Qin Xiang
551–479 BCE	Life of Kong Fuzi (Confucius) (conventional dates)
480–221 BCE	Warring States Period
361–338 BCE	Reforms of Shang Yang in Qin
316 BCE	Qin conquest of Sichuan
247–210 BCE	Reign of King Zheng of Qin (221–210 BCE as Qin Shi Huangdi)
230–221 BCE	Qin conquest of the other Warring States
221–206 BCE	Qin Dynasty
206 BCE–9 CE	Western Han Dynasty
141–87 BCE	Reign of Han Wudi
9–25 CE	Xin Dynasty (reign of Wang Mang until 23 CE)
25–220 CE	Eastern Han Dynasty
220–589 CE	Period of Disunion (Six Dynasties Period)
220–265 CE	Three Kingdoms Period
265–316 CE	Western Jin Dynasty
304–439 CE	Sixteen Kingdoms Period
386–534 CE	Northern Wei Dynasty
535–581 CE	Western Wei and Northern Zhou Dynasties
581–618 CE	Sui Dynasty
589 CE	Sui conquest of southern China
618–907 CE	Tang Dynasty

907–960 CE	Five Kingdoms Period
960–1276 CE	Song Dynasty
960–1126 CE	Northern Song Period
1127–1276 CE	Southern Song Period
1271–1368 CE	Yuan Dynasty (Mongols)
1368–1644 CE	Ming Dynasty
1644–1911 CE	Qing Dynasty (Manchu)

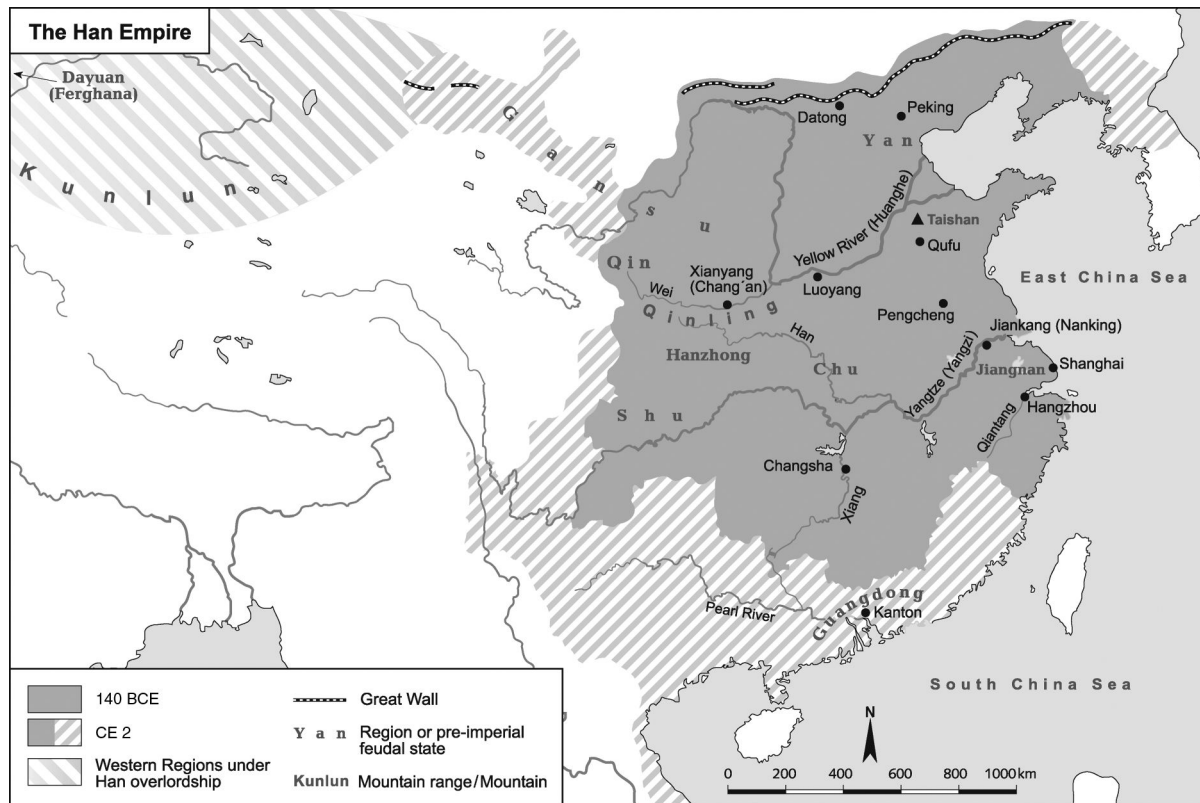
ROME

753 BCE	Foundation of Rome (conventional date)
753–510 BCE	Roman regal period (conventional dates)
c.650–600 BCE	Emergence of Latin city-state culture
509–27 BCE	Roman Republic (conventional dates)
396 BCE	Conquest of Veii (conventional date)
338 BCE	Full control over Latium
326–272 BCE	Wars of conquest in peninsular Italy
264–146 BCE	Wars against Carthage
215–168 BCE	Wars against Macedon
192–188 BCE	War against the Seleucid Empire
206–133 BCE	Conquest of Iberian Peninsula
133–30 BCE	Period of civil wars
91–89 BCE	Social War against Italian allies
88–64 CE	Wars against Pontus and Armenia
58–51 BCE	Conquest of Gaul
48–44 BCE	Dictatorship of Julius Caesar
43–32 BCE	Second Triumvirate
27 BCE	Formal restoration of the Republic
27 BCE–235 CE	Principate (early imperial monarchy)
27 BCE–14 CE	Reign of Augustus
235–284 CE	Period of the Soldier Emperors
284–305 CE	Reign of Diocletian
284–602/641 CE	Later Roman Empire
306–337 CE	Reign of Constantine
313 CE	Formal toleration and beginning of state support for Christianity
325 CE	Council of Nicaea
330 CE	Establishment of Constantinople
391 CE	Ban of pagan temples and sacrifices
395 CE	Final separation of the eastern and western halves of the empire

410 CE	Sack of Rome by the Goths
476/480 CE	Termination of the Western Roman Empire
527–565 CE	Reign of Justinian
534–554 CE	East Roman wars of reconquest in the western Mediterranean
602–628 CE	War against the Sasanid Empire (Persia)
634–718 CE	Arab invasions
800 CE	Charlemagne crowned Roman Emperor
962 CE	Otto I crowned Roman Emperor
1204 CE	Crusader conquest of Constantinople
1453 CE	Turkish conquest of Constantinople
1806 CE	Dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation
1870 CE	End of the Papal States



MAP 1. *The Roman Empire (c. 200 CE)*



MAP 2: *The Han Empire (c. 2 CE)*

STATE POWER IN ANCIENT CHINA AND ROME

Introduction

Walter Scheidel

THE dramatic expansion of the scale of human cooperation has been the most important development in social evolution. What did it take to incorporate diverse local communities into larger structures that allowed the mobilization and coordination of resources across thousands of miles and millions of people?¹ The growth of state power has been a key element of this process, yet its causes are still much debated across academic disciplines.² Given the success of state-level societies in most of the world, this problem is best addressed from a comparative perspective. The same holds true for the study of empire, a form of centralized cooperation that dominated the more developed parts of the globe for thousands of years.

Comparative history has many uses.³ Drawing historians out of their comfort zones of specialist expertise, comparison defamiliarizes the deceptively familiar. Consideration of alternatives makes the characteristics of one's "own" case seem less self-evident and helps us appreciate the range of possible outcomes. In Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin's words, comparison's "chief prize is a way out of parochialism."⁴ Comparison allows us to identify problems and questions that are not readily apparent from the historical record of a given time or place or from specialized scholarship beholden to its own "local" priorities and discourses. But raising new questions is only a first, if vital, step. Comparison is of particular importance in the process of explaining historical developments: "Comparative historical inquiry is fundamentally concerned with explanation and the identification of causal configurations that produce major outcomes of interest."⁵ A comparative approach encourages us to think in terms of specific factors that operate in different environments and how

1. See Turchin et al. 2012 for a recent overview.

2. Scheidel 2013 offers an up-to-date survey of the debate.

3. Valuable discussions of the methods and practices of comparative history include Bonnell 1980; Skocpol and Somers 1980; Tilly 1984; Ragin 1987; Haupt and Kocka 1996; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a.

4. Lloyd and Sivin 2002: 8.

5. Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003b: 11.

they are configured in individual cases. The goal is to move from description and “local” narratives of explanation to more rigorous causal investigation: “Analyses that are confined to single cases... cannot deal effectively with factors that are largely or completely held constant within the boundaries of the case (or are simply less visible in that structural or cultural context). This is the reason why going beyond the boundaries of a single case can put into question seemingly well-established causal accounts and generate new problems and insights.”⁶ In the final analysis, we must ask ourselves whether it is even possible (let alone desirable) to make sense of observed outcomes by looking at a single case.

This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of the methodological issues involved in comparative history and their relevance for students of the ancient world.⁷ Suffice it to note that comparison is best understood as a highly flexible approach or perspective rather than a formal method, and that it must be employed as a means to an end and not as an end in itself: hence the emphasis on generating new questions and improved causal explanation. It also merits attention that comparative perspectives tend to destabilize entrenched disciplinary practice: they can be hard to reconcile with normative ideals of technical competence (especially in the philological domain) and in their emphasis on discrete variables may conflict with the notion that all historical processes are deeply embedded in and therefore inextricable from their respective environments. These tensions are real but also fruitful inasmuch as they prompt us to question established academic tastes and beliefs. Serious engagement with comparative history has the potential to change the ways in which scholarly knowledge is produced, most notably by encouraging close collaboration across different areas of expertise. More generally, a comparative perspective offers a much-needed antidote to hyperspecialization, a bane of contemporary professional historiography.

And indeed, much of the best scholarship on the history of empire treats it as a theme, as a phenomenon to be explored cross-culturally.⁸ This book is designed as a contribution to this endeavor. It focuses on two case studies, the Qin and Han Empires in East Asia and the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean basin and its hinterlands. One-on-one comparison may be ill suited to the testing of more general models, given that very small samples cannot be expected to support generalizing findings,⁹ but it compensates for this shortcoming by offering

6. Rueschemeyer 2003: 332.

7. I develop this in Scheidel forthcoming b.

8. E.g., Eisenstadt 1963; Kautsky 1982; Doyle 1986; Mann 1986; Finer 1997; Lieven 2000: 3–40; Alcock et al. 2001; Motyl 2001; Howe 2002; Bang and Bayly 2003; Wood 2003; Elliott 2006; Chua 2007; Munkler 2007; Blanton and Fargher 2008; Darwin 2008; Hurler 2008; Morris and Scheidel 2009; Scheidel 2009a; Turchin 2009; Burbank and Cooper 2010; Parsons 2010; Bang and Bayly 2011; Leitner 2011; Bang and Kolodziejczyk 2012; Cooper 2004; Reynolds 2006; Vasunia 2011 review some recent efforts. Bang, Bayly, and Scheidel forthcoming will further broaden the scope.

9. For this problem see Rueschemeyer 2003.

greater depth and deeper contextualization than more wide-ranging surveys that require higher levels of abstraction.

Why China and Rome? The Han and Roman Empires were the largest polities of the ancient world and among the longest lasting of all premodern imperial formations. In their heyday they controlled only a small percentage of the global land mass but perhaps half the entire world population. Expanding and collapsing at roughly the same time, in some ways they seem like twins at opposite ends of Eurasia—an image well captured by Han observers' reference to a "Greater Qin" in the Far West. Yet for all their many similarities these polities developed independently of each other, a fact that greatly simplifies direct comparison by minimizing interaction effects.¹⁰ Only the comparative study of Old and New World empires would offer even more strongly autonomous cases but it also would have to confront more pronounced ecological differences. The experience of the ancient empires of eastern and western Eurasia serves as a natural experiment of independent state formation in broadly similar ecological circumstances but differentiated by basic contrasts in geography, between the Mediterranean realm of the Romans and the internally segmented land empire of the Han, and between the proximity of the steppe frontier to the core of Qin and Han power and its remove from the western inner sea. The most striking divergence concerns their afterlife: the effective absence of universal empire from post-Roman Europe and its serial reconstitution in East Asia. Whether and to what extent these discrepant trends are explained by the particular characteristics of the Han and Roman Empires remains an open (and much-neglected) question.¹¹

Comparative study of ancient eastern and western Eurasia is nothing new but has only recently begun to gain momentum, driven in no small part by the rise of China in the world today: ancient historians do not operate in a vacuum, nor should they wish to.¹² The traditional emphasis on Greek and Chinese intellectual culture remains strong, resulting in a substantial literature that has recently been brilliantly reviewed by Jeremy Tanner.¹³ Comparative engagement with Greco-Roman and early Chinese historiographical traditions has been growing apace.¹⁴ There is now enough scholarship on these topics to lay the foundations for a new area of teaching and research, one that might be called "comparative classics."

10. For the scale of distance between them and the striking limits of information about the other side, see briefly Scheidel 2009a: 3–5. Hoppál 2011 is the most recent study of the latter. Of course, some forces concurrently acted on both empires, such as climate change: e.g., Chase-Dunn, Hall, and Turchin 2007.

11. See Scheidel 2009b: 20–3, 2011a. I will deal with this in greater detail in Scheidel in progress b. For a systematic long-term comparative assessment of social development in eastern and western Eurasia, see Morris 2010, 2013.

12. See my discussion in Scheidel forthcoming a.

13. Tanner 2009. Relevant work includes Raphals 1992; Lloyd 1994, 1996, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006; Hall and Ames 1995, 1998; Lu 1998; Kuriyama 1999; Jullien 2000; Shankman and Durrant 2000, 2002; Cai 2002; Lloyd and Sivin 2002; Anderson 2003; Reding 2004; Sim 2007; Yu 2007; King and Schilling 2011. Forthcoming Cambridge dissertations by Qiaosheng Dong and Jenny Zhao will add to this body of scholarship.

14. Konrad 1967; Mutschler 1997, 2003, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b; Stuurman 2008; Martin 2009, 2010; Mittag and Mutschler 2010. See also Schaberg 1999; Kim 2009; and cf. Poo 2005.

The comparative study of the state and its institutions has also finally begun to attract more attention. Following sporadic attempts in the 1980s and 1990s, interest has significantly increased over the past decade or so.¹⁵ For now, pride of place belongs to two book-length collections of essays published in 2008 and 2009 that have dealt with representations of empire and a variety of imperial institutions.¹⁶

There are many different ways of writing comparative history, and this volume illustrates several approaches. One of the most promising of them is collaboration between experts on particular civilizations, a process that ensures consistently high levels of substantive competence but requires the right “matching” of coauthors to work well. Our opening chapter, by the historian of Rome Peter Bang and the China historian Karen Turner, showcases the strengths of this approach. The majority of contributors have chosen to explore a given topic from both sides: Corey Brennan, Mark Lewis, Carlos Noreña, and me, and to a lesser degree Peter Eich and Michael Puett, who primarily focus on one case.¹⁷ This format promotes coherence but critically relies on historians’ willingness to venture beyond their original areas of specialization. A third option is the pairing of complementary chapters on the same topic, exemplified by Dingxin Zhao’s and (again) Eich’s discussions of the Han and Roman imperial bureaucracies. In this case, comparison is more implicit in nature and arises mostly from the juxtaposition of more narrowly focused treatments. This approach offers the advantage of highlighting differences in interpretation in a way that could not easily be accommodated in jointly authored work: witness the two authors’ different views regarding the character of Western Zhou officialdom or the Chinese civil service examinations. This is as it should be, reflecting as it does the rich variety of positions held in contemporary scholarship. Taken together, these contributions therefore offer as much an introduction to the practice of comparative historical study as a survey of some of the most salient aspects of imperial state formation in ancient eastern and western Eurasia.

Our discussion revolves around four key issues: the relationship between rulers and elites (chapters 1 and 2), the recruitment, organization, and funding of state agents (chapters 3, 4, and 5), interdependences between state power and urbanism (chapters 6 and 7), and the political dimension of belief systems (chapter 8). Bang and Turner set the scene by taking a look at patrimonial politics, focusing on elite status and the relationship between state rulers and elites.

15. Hsing 1980; Evans 1985; Lorenz 1990; Motomura 1991; Gizewski 1994; Adshead 2000: 4–21, 2004: 20–9; Lieven 2000: 27–34; Hui 2005; Dettenhofer 2006; Custers 2008; Carlson 2009; Edwards 2009; Burbank and Cooper 2010: 23–59; Brennan and Hsing 2010; Zhou 2010. My own relevant work includes Scheidel 2008a, 2009b, 2009d, 2010a, 2011a, 2011c, forthcoming a, forthcoming b, forthcoming c.

16. Mutschler and Mittag 2008; Scheidel 2009a.

17. In this regard they follow the template adopted by each of the contributors to Scheidel 2009a, which stands in marked contrast to the repeated pairing of “Chinese” and “Roman” chapters in Mutschler and Mittag 2008, followed by final comparisons. For discussion of these approaches, see Kelly 2009 and Vasunia 2011.

Their comparative perspective reveals notable differences, such as that between the “city-state” culture of the ancient Mediterranean and Han urbanism, but also serves to qualify other differences, such as the perceived contrast between Han Confucianism and Roman militarism. They observe that both systems proclaimed hostility to despotic rule and developed a discourse of exemplary kingship. In their view, parallels such as this “reflect the logic of the situation: shared organizational constraints and broad similarities in the constitution of society, the structure of power, and processes of elite formation.” This highlights a crucial benefit of comparative study, its capacity to recognize broad patterns obscured by a preoccupation with “local” details and to identify significant differences between particular cases. Brennan compares processes of deliberation and decision making in the Han and Roman Empires. Drawing on a wide range of individual instances, he documents the important role of formal councils in both environments, backed by the force of custom. This adds to Bang and Turner’s inventory of structural similarities that were shaped by parallel concerns and constraints.

Zhao and Eich explore a key issue of state power: the identity of state agents and the ways in which they were recruited and managed. Zhao emphasizes the bureaucratic tradition of the Han Empire, which were already foreshadowed in the Western Zhou period, and analyzes its complex centralized mode of organization. He draws attention to mechanisms of performance checking that were critical in addressing principal-agent problems. Zhao considers Han-style Confucianism instrumental in recruiting officials and managing relations between rulers and elites. Weaknesses of the system included the internal differentiation of the imperial court, the aristocratic bias of recruitment practices, and the reliance on local clerks. He argues that early Chinese bureaucratization should not be taken as a sign of precocious “modernity”: it could emerge under a variety of circumstances independent of other features that characterized later Western modernization. Eich is at pains to distinguish between different degrees of bureaucratic development and consequently more skeptical of the notion of early Chinese bureaucratization. His main focus is on the emergence of patrimonial protobureaucratic structures under the Roman monarchy, a process that accelerated under the pressures of the third century CE and is well documented for the following period. His sketch of the late Roman system of administration in section 6 of his chapter invites direct comparison with Zhao’s portrayal of its Han counterpart. Like Zhao, Eich discusses principal-agent issues and spiritual guidelines for Roman officials, noting the absence of ideological underpinnings equivalent to those of Han Confucianism. Comparison with early China leads Eich to stress the central importance of the military sector and of municipal autonomy in the exercise of Roman state power and to identify the way communities were managed in the two empires as a critical variable in accounting for long-term differences between them.

In my own chapter I use evidence for state revenue and spending as an indicator of the size and power of the state, the nature of bargaining between rulers and taxpayers, and the identity of primary beneficiaries of imperial resource redistribution: the flow of taxes lays bare the “skeleton” of the state. In keeping with Eich’s conclusions, we find that the Roman and Han Empires prioritized spending on the military and on administrative state agents, respectively, a contrast that reflects their organizational and power structures. Levels of elite compensation also differed, favoring the top tiers of Roman officeholders. That the overall share of the state in national income appears to have been similar in both cases points to the presence of powerful constraints on premodern revenue collection irrespective of institutional context. Whether Han mechanisms of taxing and spending were more resilient in the long run and thus more conducive to subsequent imperial reunification remains an open question that warrants further study.

Two chapters deal with urbanism, a critical factor in the constitution and exercise of state power. Noreña argues that while state power was significant in structuring urbanization, outcomes differed in ways that reflect differences in administrative practice. The characteristics of the imperial capitals illustrate this difference well: while the city of Rome grew and developed over time, the Qin and Han capitals were born of massive state intervention. In both contexts, state power created what Noreña labels “artificial cities,” settlements next to army camps along the Roman frontiers and the tomb cities of the Chinese capital region. Both resulted from key features of each system, the paramount role of the standing army in the Roman Empire and the importance of dynastic continuity under the Han, which was lacking in Rome. Noreña tracks the origins of the greater government control over Han cities, which contrasted with the autonomy of Roman urban elites, to the establishment of direct state rule over the rural population in the Warring States period, a process that disempowered urban nobilities. Conversely, the cities of the Roman Empire continued to function as independent sources of social power. This proved costly as local elite autonomy uneasily coexisted with the fiscal demands of a powerful military complex. Noreña suggests that comparison with Han practice allows us to reinterpret what is often regarded as evidence of Roman efficacy as a sign of weakness that limited the infrastructural capacities of the state and might even have had long-term consequences in the aftermath of imperial collapse. Lewis compares Han and Roman forms of urbanism by focusing on their physical properties and social dynamics. This approach reinforces the impression of difference noted by Noreña. Whereas public display of political power was central to the Roman world and reflected in the spatial configuration of cities, the exclusionary principle dominated in China. Unlike in Roman cities with their assembly places and theaters, in Han cities the people gathered in markets, which served as conduits of state control. Like Noreña, Lewis observes urban continuity and autonomy in the Roman world, transience and centralized control in Han China: “Roman and

Han Empires thus crafted their cityscapes to display the nature of the ruler, the role of the army, the place of local elites, and the defining characteristics of civilization.” Yet he is careful to note that Han cities also provided spaces for those outside the official hierarchy.

In the final chapter, Puett expands our discussion into the sphere of ideological power by discussing the origins and ramifications of divine rulership, focusing mostly on early China. He identifies different models of “political theology” in the Han period: the concept of divine rulership that represents a radical break with older traditions that derived aristocratic power from ancestral spirits; the notion of an all-encompassing patriarchal lineage linked to Heaven (a deity); and doctrines of self-divinization that were available to the general population and associated with millenarian movements. Both the first and the last of these supported claims of the creation of a new order. Puett notes that in the Roman Empire, divine rulership likewise became established at a time of political rupture and that it in turn prepared the ground for later human divinization movements such as Christianity. Belief systems in East and West may thus have undergone similar developments in response to changes in the nature of political power.

What lessons are we to draw from these comparisons? Our contributors identify numerous instances in which two empires that were faced with similar problems came up with similar solutions: in the realm of discourse, the promotion of idealized rulership in contradistinction to despotic practices; the growth of hierarchy, centralization, and bureaucratic features, which unfolded in response to interstate conflict, the intensity and therefore the institutional consequences of which varied greatly between these two test cases; the effective scale of taxation; cultures of collective deliberation among elites; the interaction effects between state power and urbanism; and religious responses to political change. Many more similarities could have been observed.¹⁸

Yet it is major differences that are of most value in helping us understand the relationship between particular factors and outcomes. In this case, they concern the management of cities and the role of the military. Our discussions of bureaucracy (Eich, Zhao); elite fashioning (Bang and Turner); the nature of capital cities, “artificial cities,” and local administration (Noreña); and the physical appearance of cityscapes (Lewis) all converge in revealing the crucial significance of local autonomy. Put very broadly, the contrast is between an early Chinese system of more direct state control over cities and state-employed agents that facilitated deeper (even if, by modern standards, quite limited) penetration of society by the civilian institutions of the central state and a Roman system of greater local autonomy and stronger state reliance on and investment in military institutions.

18. See esp. Gizewski 1994, with Scheidel 2009a: 4, 2009b: 15–20.

The proximate causes for these differences are quite clear: the continuous Greco-Italic tradition of city-state cultures in the West and the intensive extraction-coercion cycle of the Warring States period in the East. The mechanisms of higher-level causation, however, are more difficult to identify: for instance, how much did geographical and ecological conditions contribute to these developments? In terms of outcomes, our observations raise two big questions. One concerns the causal interdependence of specific features. Could an empire built on city-state institutions have grown as large and lasted as long as the Roman Empire in the absence of an inflated military apparatus that counterbalanced autonomous local bases of social power, and did the more centralized administrative organization of the Han state diminish the structural importance of the military sector? The other is about long-term trends, namely the disappearance of empire on a Roman scale from later Europe and its cyclical reconstitution in East Asia. Did the Qin-Han mode of deeper civilian penetration provide a more robust foundation for imperial continuation (though not ongoing continuity) than Rome's prioritizing of more socially marginal military power? Once again, the latter question requires consideration of a wide range of factors from the physical environment to belief systems.

These studies therefore contribute to a much broader debate. More could have been said on matters related to state power: about rulers, their functions and succession; military affairs; state law; the role of transcendent religion; frontier relations; or economic policies, to name just a few.¹⁹ Many of these, one suspects, may turn out to be of critical importance in answering the big questions raised here. And even that would merely be a first step. Historians of premodern empire have yet to develop viable strategies for analytical multicase comparisons, an undertaking that at the level of resolution attempted in this volume raises serious challenges to established scholarly practice and calls for a reorganization of historical research that puts much stronger emphasis on teamwork and formal hypothesis testing. Our collection cannot offer more than a building block for more ambitious edifices, offered in the spirit of experimentation and in the hope that others will take us further.

19. Several of these topics were addressed in the 2008 conference that inspired this volume but constraints of space and time prevented their inclusion.

Kingship and Elite Formation

Peter Fibiger Bang and Karen Turner

Qin entrusted its future solely to punishments and laws, without changing with the times, and thus eventually brought about the destruction of its ruling family. If, after it had united the world under its rule, Qin had practiced benevolence and righteousness and modeled its ways upon the sages of antiquity, how would Your Majesty ever have been able to win possession of the empire?¹

Among the more surprising parallels between the Roman and early Chinese Empires is the similarity in the type of founding myths circulated by the imperial monarchies. Both the Han Dynasty and the Roman principate of Augustus were presented as alternatives to the rule of a self-serving despot. It was—as one later historical reconstruction made a powerful adviser explain to Gaodi, the first Han emperor—only because the Qin, the dynasty to unite China, had governed with superb arrogance and based its power on harsh, brutal command that he had been able to raise the banner of rebellion and topple the former regime less than two decades after it had conquered the realm. From the time when Duke Xiao of Qin (368–338 BCE) appointed a so-called legalistically inclined reformer to implement policies to strengthen the kingdom's military and economic capacity, the kings of this far western state had become increasingly absolutist. The First Emperor of Qin (221–210 BCE) built upon these reforms to win an empire; but his name would forever be linked with tyranny, even while his mighty accomplishment awed his contemporaries. Sima Qian, who with his father authored the founding work of Chinese historiography, the *Shiji*, rarely missed an opportunity to include in its pages declarations of hatred for everything the Qin emperor represented, but nonetheless marveled at his success. The legitimacy of the Han Dynasty, however, was constructed in express opposition. Not ruthless command and dictate were to characterize the new dispensation, but respect for the time-hallowed traditions preserved in classical scripture and ancient lore—that would guarantee a clement form of rulership exercised

1. Sima Qian, *Shiji* 97.2699. The most definitive English translation to date is the series compiled by Nienhauser 1994–2010 to which we refer throughout, unless the renderings of Watson 1993 in two volumes on the Han Dynasty are the only translations available. Here see Nienhauser vol. 2: 66–7. We have used the Zhonghua edition, Peking, 1962, for the *Shiji* throughout and have altered slightly Nienhauser's translations in some cases.

with paternalistic benevolence toward the common people and respect for justice. This, then, was to become the promise of the Han rulers.²

No less a guarantee was issued with the introduction of the imperial monarchy in Rome. After he had won sole power, Julius Caesar had famously been assassinated. Certain that the “dictator for life” was about to proclaim himself king, a group of aristocrats had formed a conspiracy, anxious that the end of republican political traditions would leave no room for them, no honor and no liberty, but instead see the imposition of one man’s oppressive tyranny on society. Bent on not repeating the mistake of his adoptive father, Caesar’s heir carefully designed his position of power in the opposite fashion. He pledged to rule not as a revolutionary dictator but as the paternalistic and respectful guardian of Roman traditions. When, after a good decade of civil war, power was finally his, the republican constitution was magnanimously restored in an ostentatious gesture. The new dispensation of power would defer to the venerable ways of the forefathers, the *mos maiorum*; and the monarch feigned to leave plenty of room for the old elite, governing only as the first among equals: august, loving, and generous Father of the Country.³

There is more than curious coincidence at play here. But it is not simply a banal expression of the fact that the social order in both societies was patriarchal. Rather, it is a result of fundamental similarities in the processes of elite formation: the ruling class, solidly based in landownership, was in both cases faced with a royal court that commanded a large centralized military capacity, but claimed a territory too extensive to be ruled and monitored tightly. Given the available transport and communication technologies, considerable delegation of power was unavoidable. The negotiation of rank and privilege took place within these basic parameters. However, the configuration of social forces brought the process to articulation in slightly varying ways within our two world empires.

For the Augustan program of republican restoration was pitted against Augustus’s rival for power, Antony. The latter had teamed up with Cleopatra, ruler of the most important and affluent client kingdom of Rome: Egypt. In the final phase of the struggle for power, Augustus had played to Roman fears that Antony, if victorious, would relocate the capital from Italy to Alexandria in the eastern Mediterranean; the conquering Romans would end up as subjects in their own empire under an Oriental despotism. In this situation, Augustus stepped up as

2. The use of the short life of the Qin Empire as a foil for the virtues of the Han is in part a response to suspicions about the legitimacy of the commoner dynastic founder, Liu Bang’s, use of force to reunify China. For an interpretive study of the historiography of the text, see, for example, Durrant 1995.

3. See Osgood 2006 for an analysis of the period from Caesar’s death to Octavian’s victory to become sole ruler. The character of the principate is the object of countless studies. A good entry to this literature is provided by Galinsky 2005, in particular the contributions of Eder and Gruen. Other notable titles include Zanker 1988; Raaf-laub and Toher 1990; and Rowe 2002. Classic and immortal is Syme 1939.

the guardian of the Roman city-state and the privileges of its ruling group.⁴ No doubt the accusations hurled against Antony were both slanderous and cynically exaggerated. After all, a copious section of the Roman senatorial aristocracy fought on his side. But among many Romans at the time, there was a clear understanding that the institutions of the Roman state were being undermined by the empire.⁵

Had they known the history of the Qin-Han transition, their concerns would have given way to outright alarm. The precipitous fall of the Qin was brought about precisely by the successful rise of the provinces. In a movement spearheaded by a common laborer disgruntled with the oppressive Qin laws, the provincial elites rose up in rebellion.⁶ The deciding battles pitted two very different characters from the state of Chu: Xiang Yu, the scion of an old noble family, and Liu Bang, once a low-level Qin bureaucrat and now, through military success, the king of the state of Han—from which he took the name for his dynasty.⁷ In 202 BCE after the feudal lords submitted to Liu Bang, his own warriors urged him to change his title: “Great king, if you do not elevate your title, all of [our titles] will be suspected and not trusted.” The king of Han protested the ritually prescribed three times and accepted the highest honor, “August Emperor,” ironically following the precedent set by the First Emperor of Qin. In order to maintain order in the realm, he then parceled out a substantial portion as vassal kingdoms and gave them to the most prominent of his warriors to rule.⁸ At first, Gaodi established his capital in Luoyang, once the seat of the revered—if weakened—kings of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty and was only persuaded to move from this site, redolent with the symbolism of traditional kingship, when his advisers reminded him that the old Qin homeland was better defended.⁹ Eventually, the rulers of the empire would go through with the permanent transfer of their residential city farther to the east. This happened two centuries later with the establishment of the later Han Dynasty, eager to polish its traditionalist credentials. But for the moment, the resources

4. Dio Cassius 50.3–6.1. See Syme 1939: chapter 20 for an analysis of Octavian’s “propaganda” and reminder that a large and prominent section of the Roman aristocracy followed Antony. For further elaboration, see Osgood 2006: chapter 8 and Lange 2009.

5. To which the contemporary writings of Sallust bear vivid testimony, in particular the *War against Jugurtha*.

6. See *Shiji* 48 in Watson 1993: vol. 1, 3–13 for an account of the commoners who began the revolt—a construction of history that demonstrates that the Qin despotism not only offended the aristocrats who lost their lands and positions but also enraged the common people. See further *Shiji* 97 (Watson 1993: vol.1, 219–37) on the rise of the provinces and their elites.

7. For the First Emperor of Han, we use the name Liu Bang during the civil war and Gaodi after he took the throne. His posthumous name is Gaozu. His title, king of Han, was given to him by his rival, Xiang Yu, during the wars after the fall of Qin.

8. *Shiji* 8.365; see Nienhauser vol. 2: 66–7. The title “August Emperor” (Huangdi) carried religious as well as secular implications, for it was the emperor’s title as head of the imperial clan, while “Son of Heaven” (Tianzi) signaled his role as head of state, and by the middle period of Han, these roles were distinguished in rituals of accession. For a very interesting and unique interpretation, see Nishijima 1961 and Puett’s discussion of the religious implications of the title in chapter 8 of this volume.

9. *Shiji* 8.366. Nienhauser vol. 2: 68. The cultivation of the Zhou past by the Han, in contrast to the Qin, was a way of emphasizing a more decentralized conception of the empire; see also Pines 2008: 87.

of Qin were too important for the institutions of the imperial government to be abandoned. Less drastically, therefore, a new capital, Chang'an, was founded inside the former homeland of the kings of Qin.¹⁰ Much as the new dynasty proclaimed its dislike of the previous rulers, it still needed large parts of the preexisting infrastructure of power. Not only were the legal codes and bureaucratic structure of Qin adopted, with some modifications, as the basis of government, several of the most talented and powerful officials of the former dynasty were also co-opted to help run the new empire.¹¹

In that respect, the consolidation of the Han Dynasty much resembles the arrangement reached by the Roman principate. Overtly, Augustus and his successors professed to continue the old traditional republican order while developing a new autocratic set of institutions to rule the empire. So if the rise of the provinces was surprisingly swift on the Chinese side of our comparison, Rome was soon to begin to converge.¹² Under the benevolent patronage of the Caesars, the composition of the imperial elite was gradually changed to include a steadily growing number of provincials. This, then, is the theme this essay sets out to explore: empire and the formation of cosmopolitan elites. Three sections follow: the first attempts to locate our discussion within a general context of patrimonial politics; the second offers a structural comparison of the character of imperial elites in Rome and Han China and the different components of aristocratic status; finally, the third section moves our analysis to the level of discourse to examine the dialogue between court and elites across our empires.

1. PATRIMONIAL POLITICS OF COMPLEX AGRARIAN EMPIRES

Both the Roman and Han Empires belong firmly within a category of complex agrarian empires; they combined strong central state institutions with a significant role still left to play by local, decentralized elites. They also sport some bureaucratic developments, but unfolding within a context that remained highly patrimonial.¹³ It would, for instance, be conventional to contrast the aristocratic character of Rome's ruling elites with the bureaucratic cadres of Chinese imperial society. But that is too schematic. "Aristocratic" or "bureaucratic," it bears emphasizing, are not "real" terms. Rather, these concepts represent ideal types, simplifying labels, often little more than an expression of historiographical habit, used by scholars

10. In the Han narratives, the causes for the victory of the state of Qin over its rival kingdoms did not arise from its internal reforms, but rather from external factors, such as the strategic advantages of its location. For an interesting discussion about the location of the capital in the early years of Gaodi's reign, see *Shiji* 99, the biography of Liu Jing, Watson 1993: vol. 1, 235–46. For the significance of the importance of the locations and construction of imperial cities, see Noreña and Lewis, chapters 6 and 7, in this volume.

11. See *Shiji* 53 (Watson 1993: vol. 1, 91–8), the biography of Gaodi's prime minister, Xiao He, the official most active in preserving the Qin laws and constructing a suitable palace for Gaodi. The excavation of portions of the Han code reveal just how similar it was to that of the Qin. See Li and Wen 2001.

12. See Scheidel 2009b for the notion of convergence between Chinese and Roman history.

13. See Bang and Bayly 2011 for a recent collection of studies exploring this type of empire.

to organize and make sense of a complex past reality. In practice, as Walter Scheidel remarked in the first book of this project, the contrast may be overdrawn.¹⁴ Officeholding was an important component of Roman elite status while record keeping and legal expertise were an integral part of the functioning of government.¹⁵ Conversely, in the fluid social arena of Han China, a pig breeder could famously become an important adviser, but in the end, bureaucrats aimed above all to secure land and its fruits as a firm base to enhance family interests. As a group, Chinese officeholders were predominantly drawn from the affluent strata of landowners; bureaucratic recruitment depended to a significant extent on personal patronage and recommendation, or even purchase, while education was not what we today would call technical, but of a gentlemanly kind, an exercise in civilization through study of classical literary models.¹⁶ It may, therefore, be better in our comparison to proceed by identifying a number of fundamental similarities to provide a common baseline for the analysis. As Shmuel Eisenstadt demonstrated long ago, traditional bureaucratic empires, ruled from an autocratic court, faced a universal set of problems but called on local, indigenous cultural forms to address them.¹⁷

One such similarity is the extensive use at both courts of persons who had undergone, in one form or other, what Orlando Patterson described as social death: slaves and eunuchs.¹⁸ The need of the emperors to have recourse to such socially castrated people is a clear sign that the relations between ruler and elite unfolded in a context of so-called patrimonial politics. The contours of power, social as well as political, were to a significant extent defined by tradition, landed estates, family, and personal patronage. In such a system, officials tended to use their public positions to forge “private” networks of patronage and property. Monarchs answered to no superior power and royal resources were constantly diverted to aristocratic means.¹⁹ Hence a ruler also required the service of

14. Scheidel 2009b: 19 and n. 21.

15. See Woolf 2009 on the significance of written records in Roman patrimonial society; Schiavone 2005: 269–389 on the development of Roman law under the principate.

16. For a detailed study of recruitment into bureaucratic office, see Loewe 2004: 109–54 and Bielenstein 1980: 141, which mentions the periodic sale of offices, a price that would then, we can be sure, be recuperated from subjects afterward. See also Zhao’s account, chapter 3, in this volume. For a readable, revisionist study of the classics and politics in Han China, see Nylan 2001, whose interpretation confirms our view that not until the later empire (960–1911 CE), did the examination system become the primary means to office, arguing that “before that time mobility usually depended less on the examination system than on family lines and on patronage by highly placed families with connections at court” (39).

17. Eisenstadt 1963.

18. See Patterson 1982: 1–14 for the concept of social death, in relation to slavery; Gellner 1983: chapter 2 on social castration as a way to create political servants. For the classic work on slavery in early China, see Wilbur 1943. Excavated materials from the Qin and Han eras have added to our information about the position of slaves. See, for example, Yates 2001. For eunuchs at the Chinese court, see Van Ess 2007. On Greco-Roman slavery, see the many contributions to Bradley and Cartledge 2011.

19. Kautsky 1982, particularly chapters 7–11, is a strong analysis of patrimonial politics in agrarian empires (though perhaps underestimating their degree of complexity; trade and bureaucratic administration are not external to these societies). Clapham 1985: chapter 3 is instructive on the phenomenon in modern developing countries, while North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009 point to its significance for all premodern states.

persons who were his and therefore depended solely on his favor, such as slaves, freedmen, and eunuchs. True, officeholders also relied on the structure of empire, and landholding elites were subject to the whims of emperors; but unlike the lowest orders, they worked from a platform of power outside the royal household. By contrast, the loyalties and interests of slaves and other house servants might be counted on more reliably to have been deposited with the monarch; and, if not, these nonentities could be subjected to punishment with much less controversy, indeed possibly even to the accompaniment of the spiteful cheers of an elite that generally resented the power and influence of such people.²⁰

The other side of the coin of patrimonial politics, equally visible in both empires, is that a fall from power of high-ranking members of the nonservile elite was also frequently followed by dire consequences for the individual (and family) involved. The histories of both the Roman and Chinese courts exhibit a gaudy gallery of prominent courtiers who came to a bad and humiliating end in one form or other.²¹ At any event, a mighty loser could not easily be tolerated or even risked. The resources of power that this kind of creature would have managed to accumulate while in office were too vast to be ignored. Potentially they represented a threat to the ruler or, more often, were necessary to be redistributed as benefits to secure the loyalty of the new favorites who had stepped into their shoes. These were the spoils of victory in the politics and intrigues of court society.

Yet there were other characteristics that fit the template of patrimonial politics, notably the significant influence periodically enjoyed at both courts by the family of the ruler, not least his close female relations. Furthermore, the emperors can often be observed touring their realms in patrimonial fashion; they moved about as itinerant lords granting favors, dispensing justice, and taking part in solemn religious and cosmic ritual. Qin Shihuangdi's promises to rule with beneficence were inscribed on stone stelae as he roamed the empire—not only to solidify his regime but also to gain immortality.²² While peripatetic kingship is often thought of in the context of feudalism, it was by no means confined to such politically fragmented conditions. Far from the norm, medieval

20. On elite resentment, two examples must suffice, one Roman, the other Chinese: Pliny, *Letters* 8.6, ranting about the humiliation of the Senate in voting honors to a freedman of the emperor Claudius and *Shiji* 101 for an episode that gleefully recalls how a palace eunuch was humiliated with a scornful remark that the emperor should not be accompanied by the sorry remains of what "saw and knife had left behind" (Watson 1993: vol. 1, 453–66).

21. Two famous examples: Seneca, the mighty teacher and adviser of Nero, was asked to commit suicide when the philosopher fell foul of the young monarch. In the Chinese case, the grand historian Sima Qian had himself to undergo humiliating castration, because he could not afford to buy his way out of his sentence, when he got caught on the losing side in a factional struggle at court.

22. On the travels of Roman emperors, see Millar 1977: 24–40 (a classic study of the patrimonial character of Roman emperors). For the stela inscriptions left by the First Emperor of China during his travels, where he advertised himself as one "who makes regulations and clarifies law," see Turner 1992. On the early Chinese emperor's role in clarifying, rather than creating, law, see Kern 2000 and Puett 2002 and chapter 8 in this volume for the emperor's searches for divine status and immortality.

feudalism is only a very extreme form of patrimonialism. Often enough rulers have, across the length and breadth of premodern history, been able to accumulate much greater centralizing resources. In these cases, as Max Weber remarked in his classic discussion, the ruler had to complement his household with the service of external people.²³ Thus, government became more complex, a patrimonial bureaucratic establishment in which laws and policies could be extended by a centralized government to areas far distant from the capital. From then on, office holding and access to the resources of central authority would be important assets in the formation of sociopolitical elites. Aristocratic rank was not exclusively determined by the principle of heredity, but usually arose from a combination of factors, some of them inheritable, others based on attainment. The elite groups to come out of this may usefully be described as a class of *honoratios*, the more honorable members of society.²⁴ In both empires, rank and social status formally conferred on the privileged immunity from the physical punishment by the magistrates, at least in regular cases not involving suspicion of treason against the ruler. Romans of high status would for instance normally be banned from their hometown or relegated to an island instead of suffering the dire corporal punishments meted out to lowly people.²⁵ Close attention to rank and social hierarchy was *de rigueur*. One anecdote about the emperor Wendi relates how he wanted to replace the overseer of the Shanglin park and its tiger pen with a knowledgeable low-status worker, but eventually rescinded this decision when reminded by his advisers that positions in the imperial service ought only be given to people from more elevated walks of life. Otherwise respect for social order would crumble and chaos ensue.²⁶ Thus, the *honoratios* is a notion that places the formation of elites in the Roman and Qin and Han Empires within a shared context.

2. IMPERIAL ELITE FORMATION AND THE DOMESTICATION OF ARISTOCRACY

As the result of expansion, conquest, and “civil” war, both our imperial monarchies initially fostered elites with a strong military component. During its first decades, men with a proven military track record held significant positions in the

23. Weber 1972: 580–624 remains the basic discussion of the different forms of patrimonial power. See Zhao’s discussion in chapter 3 in this volume.

24. See Quass 1993 for an attempt to employ Weber’s notion of *honoratios* in the study of Roman local elites, followed by Stephan 2002: 66–71. Further discussion is in Mann and Scholz 2012: 13–8. For Weber’s notion, also in connection with Roman and Chinese elites, see e.g. Weber 1972: 614–20, a usage we here try to develop and extend.

25. A classic discussion of legal privileges (formal as well as informal) enjoyed by the higher orders in Roman society is Garnsey 1970, whose fourth chapter deals with physical punishment to which the elites seem largely to have been immune during the principate. For the ways that Han emperors and elites made an implicit bargain that, in return for loyalty, court elites would not be mutilated—in part because the sight of mutilated humans offended the emperor—see Sanft 2005.

26. *Shiji* 102 (Watson 1993: vol.1, 467–75).

government of the Han emperor.²⁷ But both societies were complex enough to generate and require alternative avenues of elite advancement. With the consolidation of power as conquest state gave way to a stable tributary empire, the latter gained in significance.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, at the basis of elite membership was landed property; a trivial observation, perhaps, but one with important consequences. Agricultural estates, often combined with a measure of military capacity, invested elite groups with a degree of autonomy; they controlled resources of their own, independently of the state. To prevent the realms from fragmenting, the governments of the imperial courts had to reduce this independence and make significant sections of elite society, at least in part, depend for their position on access to the resources and benefits offered by the state.

Norbert Elias, the great historical sociologist, described this activity of the court as a process of disciplining and domestication of the aristocracy.²⁹ Considerable debate has ensued, but without really undermining the basic insight contained in this twin notion. Nevertheless, one valid point has emerged from the critique: that negotiation was as important an element in the functioning of courts as the top-down domestication of the elite by the ruler.³⁰ But from our perspective, the conceptualization of Elias holds one critical advantage; it offers a way of transcending the customary analytical dichotomy between patrimonial and bureaucratic, which, as pointed out above, seems inadequate for understanding our imperial societies, by calling attention to how the patrimonial elements were not simply destroyed but rather harnessed to the service of a central government. For the stark choice between patrimonialism and bureaucracy, it substitutes the alternative of the forging of an officeholding aristocracy or, as we prefer, class of *honoratiores*. To fortify the position of the Han emperor, many of the most powerful families in the realm were relocated to areas close to the new capital to make them live within the reach of the ruler and the ambience of his court.³¹ The cream of Italian elite society was already focused on Rome when the emperors set up court. But the Caesars intensified the gravitational pull of the imperial capital and drew into the Roman elite new members from a gradually widening catchment area.

27. *Shiji* 96 (see Watson 1993: vol. 1, 207–17) states that military men dominated in the beginning until Zhang Cang regulated the sound pipes and the calendar. On the role of military culture and leadership, see Chang 2007a: 272–96 and Rosenstein 2009. It is important to note that although the empire was not directly administered by military men, their informal power was considerable.

28. See Woolf 2012: 98 for the distinction between conquest state and tributary empire.

29. Elias 1969, 1997.

30. Artan, Duindam, and Kunt 2011 and Spawforth 2007 are two recent collections illustrating the lasting analytical purchase of Elias's sociology of court society while accommodating subsequent debate. Winterling 2003 is a brilliant attempt to illuminate the reign of Caligula through Elias's theories by a scholar who has also developed a nuanced critique of the approach. Cf. Winterling 1997. Van Ess 2007 explores similarities and differences of the Han court with Elias's model; Duindam 1994 and 2003 are influential discussions, though more caviling than gracious, stressing negotiation.

31. *Shiji* 99 (Watson 1993: vol. 1, 235–46) discusses the practice of moving aristocratic families for political purposes. For a useful interpretation of the politics of space, see Lewis 2006; for court life, see Van Ess 2007; on the imperial city, see Lewis 2007: 75–101 and chapter 7 in this volume.

As an instrument of power, the court served to refashion and orient significant groups in elite society toward the emperor. But both realms were of staggering size and had to accommodate several strands of elites. Habitually presenting themselves as “lords of all the world,” the emperors in both our realms were a monarch of monarchs, a universal ruler.³² Subject to their command was a host of client kings and chieftains. At the courts could be seen such lesser royalty and their scions visiting to pay homage or simply waiting in the corridors to be appointed new ruler whenever the throne became vacant in some distant realm or other. In the meantime, life at court served to socialize such individuals in the manners of imperial culture, spin them into the web of patronage and favors of high politics, and lock them into the power structure of the realm.³³ For the Chinese emperors these client kingdoms also, for a time, proved a useful expedient where some of the “excess” male offspring, produced in the imperial harem, could be given a position in accordance with their elevated origin. Recourse to the establishment of client kingdoms had been a doubly important currency of power for the founder of the Han Dynasty. It enabled him to reward the most powerful of his allies in the war to take over the throne while allowing a greater degree of autonomy to substantial parts of the empire after the “tyranny” of Qin. At the same time, the center devised strategies for controlling the kingdoms—sending out prominent scholars as tutors to the kings, posting special delegations to hear difficult cases, and dispatching military units to quell rebellion. After the rebellion of the seven kingdoms in 154 BCE, the center exerted more control and the power of the vassal kingdoms was muted.³⁴ Client kingdoms never featured as prominently in the setup of the Roman Empire. But particularly in the Near East, much of the territory claimed by Rome was first organized in this fashion, which alleviated the empire of the burden of direct administration.³⁵ However, in both our empires, as these royal vassal elites increasingly became domesticated by the central courts and imperial administration progressively was consolidated, most of the client kingdoms were phased out and absorbed within the system of regular provincial government.³⁶

32. See Pagden 1995 for the expression “lords of all the world”; Bang and Kolodziejczyk 2012 on the notion of universal empire. For a study of the various modes of ruling that emerged in early China and the move toward the idea of universal rulership, see Pines 2009.

33. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 261–333, offers a good impression of a client king closely integrated in the life and politics of the court of Caligula; *Shiji* 106 provides a parallel Chinese example where a breakdown in the personal relations with the emperor and his family leads to the withdrawal of the vassal king from court and his eventual rebellion.

34. See Loewe 2004: chapter 11 for a discussion of the vassal kingdoms in the Han Empire. After the unsuccessful rebellion of 154 BCE, these vassal states became subordinated to central control. Excavated materials from Han China reveal that laws to regulate the nobility were on the books—see Li and Wen 2001—but the historical accounts of sanctioning members of the imperial family suggest that the formal laws were rarely invoked. Rather, miscreants were charged with violating the symbols and laws of the dynasty and its founder.

35. See Braund 1984 on the Roman use of client kingdoms. These were, as Suetonius remarked in his biography of Augustus (48), treated as *membra partisusque imperii*, “component parts of the empire.” See Coşcun 2005 for a set of essays exploring various examples of Roman client kings.

36. Important work by Giele 2006 shows a Chinese provincial governor being charged with the oversight of a client ruler who had been dethroned for dishonoring the royal symbols of the Han. In Han China, the dynasty and its ritual apparatus served as the focus for continuity and loyalty rather than individual emperors. For tension between center and periphery, see Loewe 1974 and Bielenstein 1986.

That system was under the direct rule of the emperor and served his court as a fountain of offices, commands, and grants of titles and land with which to attract and promote “the flower” of elite society. Both army and administrative service offered positions of responsibility and authority suitable to confirm and enhance the dignity of men from the higher walks of life. Traditionally the civic, administrative function has dominated our image of the Chinese imperial elite. But that is a picture which needs some modification.³⁷ Military men had, as already mentioned, a significant role to play in the first decades of the Han Dynasty. Of forty-five chancellors in the Western Han government, twenty-three had military connections.³⁸ Gradually, however, men of the book began to make headway. In 136 BCE under the emperor Wudi, the fifth of the Han rulers, a canon of Confucian classics was elevated to preferred status to serve as the basis of study and promotion to office. A little more than a decade later, in 124 BCE, an imperial academy was founded with an annual examination of the students based on a curriculum drawn from the Confucian classics.³⁹ Here were the seeds of what would become the famed Chinese civil service examination system. But it is important not to project the experience of the fully developed system of the Qing Dynasty back to the earliest beginnings.⁴⁰ At first, the number of candidates was trifling and it would have taken several generations to transform the face of the court, to say nothing of elite society more widely. Across the empire the spread and reach of Confucian learning must have been very uneven and we know that local religions flourished.⁴¹ Meanwhile, Wudi was also one of the most warlike of the Han rulers and military prowess continued to be a viable route to high rank in the imperial service and to warrant esteem in Chinese society. Among the biographies in Sima Qian is the story celebrating Li Guang, a seasoned hero from the wars against the nomadic Xiongnu.⁴² This beloved and courageous military leader never reaped the official rewards for his service that he deserved and eventually killed himself after being “outmaneuvered by petty clerks.” Though lacking in polished speech, the simple warrior

37. See Di Cosmo 2009. Sima Qian in *Shiji* 107 (Watson 1993: vol. 2, 89–106) relates the fluctuating vicissitudes of the careers of two prominent courtiers, one a man of the refined arts, the other of the warrior’s craft. Both types of activity were important.

38. Chang 2007a: 281. But as Chang points out, “It is clear that there was no military intervention in politics during this period. Rather there were only ambitious political figures who attempted to gain political influence to gain control of the armed forces and then the court.” In Wudi’s reign the civilian and military were split, with military men gaining prominence. Sixty percent of the titles for the highest aristocratic rank, the marquis, were allotted to military men.

39. See Nylan 2001 for a clear description of the process of linking a textual tradition with official advancement. We are aware that the elites who identified with the Confucian ideology did not espouse completely similar opinions about government and at times became more pragmatically inclined when in office. Nor was Legalism an established school of thought, but rather a reference to elites who advocated for laws rather than education and ritual to maintain order.

40. On the Qing, see Elman 2002; in general, see Nylan 2001.

41. See Bielenstein 1980: chapter 6 on the limited role of academy examinations for recruitment to office for the first many decades. For a useful study of religion in this period, see Loewe 1986d.

42. *Shiji* 109.2876. See Nienhauser vol. 2: 201–29.

general was widely admired, his reputation towering high. Other officers were awarded an inheritable title and land, conventionally called marquises, for their military deeds.⁴³

It is true, as Michael Loewe has pointed out in a recent essay, that the dynastic histories are very much dominated by a Confucian perspective, stressing the value of letters and polite manners over the craft of war.⁴⁴ But this is a partisan, if important, retrospective version of Chinese history, with one group imposing on posterity its particular vision of what mattered in the empire. However, a coherent military culture, with its own laws and curriculum for advancement, coexisted and partly overlapped with “civil” society. Han Gaodi understood that he had to call on men learned in the classics to legitimize his rule, but he certainly also drew on other significant sources of power. The histories of the early Han bear witness to tensions between military and literati. One famous incident has the founder of the Han Dynasty urinating in a scholar’s hat to demonstrate his derision of the men of the book.⁴⁵ Considerable effort was put into accommodating the more uncouth men of the sword within the new imperial court even as a gentle process of domestication was initiated. A Confucian erudite was instructed to create a set of rituals to govern the conduct of courtiers and tame the warrior companions of the emperor, who “drank and haggled over merit, shouting like fools and hacking at the pillars of the hall with their swords.” But these rituals were to be less complex and demanding than those of the Qin, so that performance would be simple enough for the emperor (and his men) to follow. Equally, officials were asked to temper punishments for the misbehavior of such men who had been used to live under the norms of military society.⁴⁶ Even as the culture of the Han court was consolidated and Confucian norms of comportment became more firmly entrenched, emperors and elites continued to practice hunting and other martial arts. One ritual associated with the beginning of autumn demanded that emperors and officials perform a staged hunt whether in the animal parks or pens.⁴⁷ Under the later Eastern Han Dynasty the imperial government struck a still firmer Confucian pose. During the same period, however, vast aristocratic households developed as a basis for warlordism, and people examined in “the classics” never monopolized appointment to imperial office. High status continued to feed on a wider repertoire of activities, though the

43. For data about the fate of high-ranking military men, see Chang 2007a: 285. Under Wudi’s expansionist policies military leaders had more opportunities to rise to prominence and more to die in disgrace as well.

44. Loewe 2009.

45. See *Shiji* 97 (Watson 1993: vol. 1, 219–24).

46. For the process of creating ritual and domesticating military men, see the biography of Shusun Tong in *Shiji* 99 (Watson 1993: vol. 1, 235–46), a man who went over to the king of Han (Liu Bang) after serving the Second Emperor of Qin and, although a Confucian teacher, recommended outlaws and roughnecks to Liu Bang because he knew how he despised Confucian pedants. For Gaodi’s plea to the civil officials to treat his men with lenience, see *Shiji* 8, the *Annals of Gaozu* (Nienhauser vol. 2: 1–101).

47. Lewis 1990: 145 and Van Ess 2007.

dissemination of norms related to Confucian learning increasingly worked their civilizing, domesticating magic on the landowning elites in the empire.⁴⁸

By comparison, our customary image of the Roman elite is more militaristic. But here, too, greater nuance is required. In fact, a very similar development to the Chinese may be charted under the imperial monarchy.⁴⁹ If Confucian scholars propagated the model of the virtuous sage as the ideal for Chinese monarchy, the standard image projected of the Roman emperor was that of the imperator, the victorious general. This was all in the tradition of the Republic, where service as a junior officer in the citizen army had marked the obligatory starting point for every aristocratic career. Years later, the crowning achievement of a long life in high politics, coveted by all, but reserved for only the most successful few, would follow in the reward of a triumph. There a general would parade with his troops through the streets of Rome, cheered on by an ecstatic crowd, in jubilant celebration of a crushing victory won on the battlefield. But with the imposition of monarchy, this prize was denied to the members of the elite. From thence on, only the emperor (and his closest relatives) would get to bask in the glory of a public triumph.⁵⁰

Military prestige, however, remained important to the aristocratic ideal. Tacitus embarked on his career as a historian by crafting a commemorative portrait of his father-in-law, Agricola. Every inch the embodiment of aristocracy, balanced, dignified, and magnanimous, the great man is presented as outshining the emperor in war. That aristocratic mindset, which imagined the relationship between ruler and the highest-ranking members of the elite in terms of potential rivalry over prestige, could not easily be ignored by the supreme monarch.⁵¹ Individual military commands were regularly changed, and control of the army always distributed among a good number of leaders. The imperial guard was left in the hands of one or two prefects, both drawn from the second tier of the Roman elite. All these measures were precautionary and served to keep the army firmly under the control of the emperor and prevent serious rivals for the throne to emerge. In that respect, the Roman approach seems to offer the context in which to understand the Chinese attempts to downplay the significance of the military. At the Han court, too, it was a question of curtailing the power of military men and safeguarding the throne. To a Chinese catalogue of frequent dire punishments or demotion to commoner status of generals, the Romans add tales

48. On the later taming of the Chinese landholding elites through the Confucian examination system, see Crone 1989: 173; Nylan 2001; Loewe 1986d; Kramers 1986; and Ebrey 1986.

49. See Rosenstein 2009: 38–44 on the broadly similar subjection of the military to the court and elite culture in both our empires. See further Mutschler and Mittag 2008: 431, noting the persistent valorization of military prowess, even as the Roman elite became more like the Chinese, oriented toward cultural achievement. But to this ought to be added the nuance that military accomplishment also had greater purchase in the Chinese case than the literati traditionally liked to concede.

50. Syme 1939: 404. On the triumph, see in general Beard 2007; Östenberg 2009.

51. Tacitus, *Agricola* 39–42; see Hopkins and Burton 1983: 121–3 on potential rivalry between senators and ruler.

of exile and execution, of forced suicide and involuntary retirement.⁵² Thus both courts were surprisingly successful in their attempts to rein in the army and domesticate its leaders. Neither the history of the Roman principate, nor that of the Han Dynasty reads like a series of frequent military coups.⁵³

As with the Han, the Roman court promoted and reinforced other spheres of social activity in which elites could seek distinction. The emperors set a new standard for public munificence and refined leisure, and they sponsored lettered learning: philosophy, law, poetry, and in particular rhetoric.⁵⁴ In both Rome and Athens were set up chairs in Greek and Latin to facilitate the education of elite youth in the noble art of graceful, ornate, and civilized speech. None of this was accompanied by a system of formal examination as in the Chinese case, but it is an open question how much of a difference this made at first. No Roman who aspired to the charmed circle of the elites could forgo a lettered education. A rustic accent or unpolished speech was an immediate object of scorn and ridicule. Not even emperors were above reproach. One story has it that Vespasian was once reprimanded by a zealously cultured noble for his vulgar pronunciation of the diphthong “au” as “o.” The way that Vespasian managed to get laughter on his side is telling. The next day he wittingly greeted this man, named Florus, as Flaurus. In one go, Vespasian had mocked his detractor as hypercorrect in his speech and bettered him by giving an effortless and witty display of verbal, courtly virtuosity.⁵⁵ The development of a refined court culture resonated well with the Roman upper class that had already begun to differentiate its life style as it grew rich during the last centuries of the Republic. Increasingly, elite ambition was channeled into a wider set of arenas for the display of social excellence. Many a rising member of the senatorial order, the highest in Roman society and from which the political leaders were drawn, stopped putting in more than a token performance of military service before returning to life in the capital.⁵⁶

52. See Chang 2007a: 285. On the Roman side, the fate of Cornelius Gallus will have to stand in for all the other incidents. Starting out as a “friend” of Augustus, he was commissioned with the prefecture of Egypt, where he scored considerable military successes, but also celebrated himself in much too conspicuous fashion. He was recalled, banned from the court, a trial was held in the senate, judgment passed, and the man driven to suicide. See Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 66.1–2. See also Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel, and Pfeiffer 2009: 5–10.

53. See Hopkins 2009: 192–5 on civilian monarchical control of the Roman army, though “depolitization” may perhaps be putting it too strongly. For a different comparative assessment, see Hsing 1980.

54. See Wallace-Hadrill 2008 for a discussion of the cultural revolution spawned by the Roman imperial monarchy.

55. Suetonius, *Life of Vespasian* 22 (on the emperor being criticized for vulgar pronunciation of diphthong *au* as *o*; it is significant that Suetonius, though in general deeming Vespasian’s humor low, found some examples worthy of record where Vespasian managed to transcend this to produce some really clever and adept sayings, “facetissima verba”) and 18 (on sponsorship of professors of rhetoric). See Maurice 2013: 152–54 on Roman imperial financing of “public” teachers in rhetoric and eventually philosophy. On polished, artful, and arcane speech as crucial aspects of Roman elite culture, see e.g. Swain 1996: chapters 1–3; Schmitz 1997. These two works focus on Greek literary culture under Roman rule, but the same basic characteristics can be identified for Latin, perhaps done most elegantly by Stroh 2007: to become a language of empire and civilization Latin had to become a “dead language,” a timeless medium fixed in a complex and demanding canon of classical works. On the art of approaching and persuading rulers in early China in a comparative light, see Lu 1998, who argues that the Chinese were as adept as rhetoricians as their Greek and Roman counterparts.

56. Talbert 1984: 14; see Woolf 2003 on the multiple dimensions of Greco-Roman elite identity and culture.

With a multifaceted elite culture, in both our worlds some people could belong to the class of *honoratiores* without ever taking up formal office within central government. For Chinese officials, the good life remained rooted in their native place, the countryside, to which a man could retire to write poetry, drink with friends, or mourn his parents while Roman poets were waxing lyrical about the delicate joys of life at the country retreats of the wealthy few.⁵⁷ Moreover, elites often had to make a hard choice—to honor their duty to serve the state or, in the case of tyrannical rulers, to withdraw to a quiet life outside the government apparatus. An elevated lifestyle might be enough for some to make their mark in society. The Romans even developed a discourse discussing under which circumstances such an honorable retirement, *honestum otium*, was possible. Equally, many of those who did hold a position in the imperial services often knew extended periods of retirement in between posts or perhaps only took up a position quite late in life.⁵⁸ But even as we identify such broad similarities in processes of elite formation, one clear and significant difference calls out for analysis. Compared to the Roman, imperial office must have been far more important to the social elites of the Chinese world; the number of positions distributed by the Han court was simply much larger, especially at the top of the governmental hierarchy.⁵⁹

To fill the positions of central government, the Roman emperor drew on the membership of the two highest orders of Roman society: the Senate and the knights. The Senate, the most eminent of the two, comprised some six hundred members, and those knights who served in high government positions probably constituted a group of similar size. That modest number, of perhaps twelve hundred persons or so, made up the elite branch of Roman court society and sufficed as a reservoir of recruits for the leading positions in the government. The Roman imperial state had available a number of offices, administrative functions, and priesthoods in the capital, in total of a few hundred. The empire was divided into some fifty to sixty provinces under a centrally appointed governor. Accompanying

57. Horace, *Sermones* 2.6, would be the classic example to draw from a vast reservoir.

58. On the Roman side, see Hopkins and Burton 1983: 166–75 (while some senators held many offices, others led a life of leisured withdrawal). On *honestum otium*, see e.g. the reflections in Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.66–72, and *Letters to Friends* 5.21.2; and the discussion in Talbert 1984: 76–8 on knights who refrained from public office. On the Chinese, see Ebrey 1978: chapter 3.

59. See Scheidel 2009b: 18–9 for a basic set of guiding observations, on differences and similarities between the bureaucratic organization of the two empires, with which we are in broad agreement, though we may differ on details. Figures for the central and provincial Roman government do, as Scheidel asserts, tend to exaggerate just how few people were employed in the imperial administration. Nevertheless, compared to the Roman, the number of centrally appointed positions available to the Han emperor was significantly larger, at least until late antiquity when Roman bureaucracy grew in size. On the other hand, in provincial government we see more local gentry and low-level officials involved on the Chinese side. It was only, but still marking a significant difference to Rome, to the level of county prefect that the officials came from outside; see n. 61 below. Of the many thousands included in figures for Chinese administration, many were also local village headmen and such, as is clear from Loewe 2004: 69 and 80–1, in spite of the equivocal observation on 47. These job descriptions reveal that the central government sent out officials charged with specific duties, such as settling disputes or putting down rebellion, when necessary.

this governor was normally a financial officer and a junior legate. In addition to this small, centrally appointed provincial government of close to two hundred officials, there were the officers in the army, some two thousand mostly stationed in the provinces.⁶⁰ Keeping out the military establishment from our comparison, we see that the administrative hierarchy went one level deeper in Han China. In the capital was a much more elaborate setup than anything in Rome, with nine ministries and accompanying bureaus. Loewe estimates a total of some thirty thousand positions in Chang'an. This figure undoubtedly exaggerates the difference with Rome. Some very minor functions are included in the estimate, which would also have been performed in the Roman case by menial people and small fry. Instead of fifty to sixty provinces, the Chinese Empire comprised some eighty commanderies and twenty client kingdoms, all governed by a setup of centrally appointed officials. But below this level, the provinces and commanderies were subdivided into some twelve hundred to sixteen hundred smaller units, counties or prefectures. The prefect was the lowest official appointed from the court.⁶¹ Instead of hundreds, the central government in the Chinese Empire appointed thousands of officials; and more in the capital than in the provinces.⁶²

This by-comparison top-heavy structure is, perhaps, not best approached as a question of administrative efficiency. In terms of tax intake or army size, the Chinese imperial governmental system did not generate a markedly higher capacity than the Roman.⁶³ Equally or more important may have been a greater need of the Han emperor to provide positions to powerful families and make manifest his power by surrounding himself with throngs of hangers on. An explanation may be approached by turning the question around. One might just as well ask why the otherwise lavish court of the Caesars could make do with far fewer people. That brings us to the level below the centrally appointed officials,

60. See Garnsey and Saller 1987: 21–6 and chapter 2 for a convenient, brief overview of the small central government of the Roman Empire, counting some 350 elite officials at the turn of the second century CE; Eck 2000 for a more detailed magisterial survey of the Roman government and bureaucracy. The figure of less than 200 officials governing the provinces does not include the slave clerks, assistants, and soldiers accompanying each centrally appointed official to the provinces. But our discussion is focused on imperial elites, not bureaucratic capacity per se. Hypothesizing an assisting setup for each province of some 100–200 persons would then place the total provincial administration of the Roman Empire in a range of 5,000–10,000. Cf. Noreña 2011: 269 n. 86, who estimates 10,000. In the Chinese case, the prefect, appointed from outside the locale in which he served, operated as the lowest-level centrally appointed official. Because he was unfamiliar with local dialects and customs, he relied on local appointees—bailiffs, clerks, militia—to maintain order and justice. What is important to note in light of new materials on Qin and Han administrative law is that the lowest-level local officials, though not appointed by the center, had to send detailed reports through a highly organized vertical structure and were circumscribed in their discretionary decisions. See, for example, Yates 1995 and Nylan 2005–6 for a fascinating discussion about a doubtful case in which local officials called in the highest law officers for counsel.

61. Bielenstein 1980: 100. In general for the Chinese imperial administration, see, in addition to Bielenstein, Loewe 2004 and 2006.

62. See Loewe 2004: 69–71 for an attempt to quantify the number of officials in the Han Empire. See also the comparison of the Roman and medieval Chinese bureaucracy in Saller 1982: 111–6 and in Hopkins and Burton 1983: 186. For a very detailed account of the bureaucratic structure of the empire, see Zhao in this volume, chapter 3.

63. Scheidel 2009d: 205 and chapter 5 in this volume.

namely the local elites who performed the bulk of the practical administration in both our examples. In the Roman Empire, this layer was constituted mainly by some two thousand “city-states.” Each of these had a town council on which members of the wealthier, mostly landowning families would have served. The size of such *gremia* varied, with one hundred often thought of as a norm. But many cities would not have been able to support such a number. So, if we operate instead with an average of fifty members, this would have produced some one hundred thousand town councilors.⁶⁴ Incidentally, this figure is comparable with the approximately one hundred thousand officials, the majority of whom would have been locally appointed, who are thought to have organized provincial administration in the Han Empire. But there is one significant difference. Set within the structures of a city-state, the landowning gentry in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean was locked into a strong collective institution. As an instrument of power, Elias pointed out, the court served to discipline or tame the aristocracy. Domestication was achieved by tying aristocrats into a social configuration where they were pitted against each other in competition for privilege, influence, and status. Aristocratic autonomy gave way to the social rules prescribed by court etiquette and politics. City-state organization, however, may similarly be seen as a configuration where the autonomy of landowners is reduced by staging a (rule-bound) competition within a collective of landowners over honor, titles, and access to the agricultural surplus.⁶⁵ This mechanism made the need for a centrally fashioned elite relatively smaller in the Roman Empire, or so we may at least hypothesize.

3. DIALOGUE AND NEGOTIATION: THE ECUMENIC DISCOURSE ON KINGSHIP

Domestication, however, is only one aspect of elite formation. Negotiation and dialogue, as already mentioned, are no less important facets to examine in the relationship between royal court and landowning gentry. Conversation between rulers and their elites found expression in the development of a discourse on the moral conduct of kingship. The monarchs, however supreme, could not invariably dictate the contents and values in this exchange. A new study of the Roman principate has, for instance, revealed a small, but significant, discrepancy or difference in emphasis between the royal virtues propagated by the imperial government on its coinage and those celebrated in the rhetorico-philosophical writings of the elite.⁶⁶ It is, in fact, a remarkable coincidence that both regimes had to subscribe to a preimperial and antityrannical ideology to legitimize their rule.

64. See Jongman 2006: 248 n. 35 for a similar estimate of the number of city councilors.

65. Cf. Harris 2001: 150, who sees the development described by Elias for the early-modern world prefigured in Greco-Roman antiquity and the emergence of the polis.

66. Noreña 2011: chapter 2.

The Han Dynasty had taken over the institutions of the vigorously absolutist conquest state of the Qin. Nevertheless, and with time increasingly so, the ideal of rulership was articulated in the idiom of Confucian thought, which drew on a stock of canonical works pretending to date back to the idolized past of the Western Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1045—771 BCE).⁶⁷ One of the most revered of these texts was the so-called *Classic of Documents*, the *Shujing*, so dangerous a text that the First Emperor of Qin ordered this collection of essays, speeches, and narratives burned and its experts buried alive.⁶⁸ Like the *Shijing*, a collection of songs supposedly composed by common people protesting the demands of the state and included in the book burning, the *Classic of Documents* celebrated a version of kingship that was attuned to the needs of the population. An early version of just war theory is put forth in the text, for it warns conquerors to protect the innocent people of a tyrannical king and impose just laws and predictable punishments in order to gain their trust and services. The order of the Han, in conspicuous contradistinction to the Qin, was to celebrate these principles, and experts who knew the texts were called to court to resolve conflicts according to the wisdom preserved in the canon. But the blueprint of kingship offered by texts such as the *Shujing* was far from unproblematic; it reflected not the reality of a unified empire, with a strong central government, but the fragmented world of weak feudal lordships symbolically presided over by the rulers of Zhou in times past. This required that the texts often be read with more than a little stretch of the imagination to serve as confirmation and precepts for the Han dispensation of political life. But neither forced anachronism nor heavily allegorical interpretation could hide from sight the memory of a society where rulers were weaker and more heavily dependent on strong and independent-minded aristocrats. A key tenet of Confucian thinking became the ability to criticize the present by drawing on the venerable examples of correct royal behavior found in the classics. Sima Qian, for example, subtly juxtaposed tales of good and bad rulers from the past to criticize the tyrant he served and declared his reasons for writing his history: “One who lives in the present age and considers the ways of the past has his own mirror wherein he might see that the two are not necessarily alike.” Thus, he was not necessarily wedded to the past, but aware that one must understand when it could be useful and when irrelevant. History could be manipulated for contemporary ends in early China as in other times and places.⁶⁹

67. See e.g. Mittag 2008 for a recent analysis of the steadily more “orthodox” version of Confucian thinking propagated by the Han court.

68. Nylan 2001 doubts that the books were burned on the emperor’s orders, but rather suspects that they perished when the Qin capital burned for three months during the civil wars. However, these books did contain judgments about the dangers of tyranny and interventionist government that must have threatened the emperor. The standard translation of *The Classic of Documents* is Legge 1935. The “Kang Gao” section of the classic contains the most pointed discussion about legitimizing rule over a people conquered by force. For a revisionist and very important discussion of the dating of texts, see Brooks and Brooks 1998.

69. *Shiji* 18.5, translated in an excellent biography by Watson 1958. Sima Qian was clear about his role in this regard. On the allegorical and forced practice of interpretation developing to refit the Confucian classics to the reality of a centralized empire, see Durrant 1995; Hardy 1999; Beecroft 2010, especially chapter 7; and Weber-Schäfer 1968: 227–88.

Overt insistence on strong and absolutist rulership was even more ideologically suspect in the Roman case. The empire had been acquired under a republican political system where political leadership was exercised within an aristocratic collective that proudly cherished its liberty and freedom from kings. The imperial monarchy was the product of a ruthless and devastating civil war, and Augustus had, as we saw above, won it while proclaiming himself the champion of the Roman *res publica*. This saddled his new autocratic regime with an obligation reverently to preserve an institutional and ideological tradition in which the name of king was anathema.⁷⁰ Theodor Mommsen, the great nineteenth-century historian of Rome, was certainly exaggerating when he declared that the Roman imperial monarchy was perhaps the stable regime most lacking in legitimacy;⁷¹ the republican institutions, after all, represented no viable political alternative to the monarchy. But the need to pay lip service to the old republican ceremonial did imbue the new order of monarchy with considerable ideological tension and angst-ridden hypocrisy.⁷² With the emperor being a king in all but name, titles, offices, rights, and honors were heaped up in overwhelming and bewildering profusion to cement the preeminence of the person who would govern the empire as an autocrat while pretending that republican political life went on as before. *Princeps*, never part of the formal title, was the word that the Romans came to use of their ruler, first among equals. This facade immediately strikes any modern observer as verging on the absurd; it would be difficult to understand why it was maintained for several centuries if not that all forms of monarchy tend to eschew the prosaic and mundane to depend on theatrical ritual. Even so, the gap between republican ceremony and the monocratic realities of power left a wide field where satire, irony, and sarcasm could castigate the hypocrisy of rulers who failed to satisfy the expectations of members of the elite. The biting histories of Tacitus are gripping testimony to this Roman habit, parallel to the Chinese, of criticizing an imperial monarchy with the moral examples of the preimperial past, but also a salient reminder of its limitations. For all his republican sympathies, Tacitus saw no real alternative to the moral corruption of the politics of the palace and the Caesars.⁷³

70. Eder 1990.

71. Mommsen 1963: 791 and 1034–40. For two recent studies, informed by Mommsen's problem, but not interpretation, see Flaig 1992; Seibel 2004.

72. This tension is explored from various perspectives in a vast number of works, from among which we mention, *exempli gratia*, Roller 2001; Rudich 1997; Bartsch 1994.

73. Syme 1958 is the classic discussion (chapter 41 tackles the political views of the Roman historian). See Woodman 2009 for a recent set of essays dedicated to Tacitus while Sailor 2008 offers an interesting take on the lack of a real alternative behind Tacitus's critique: what is left is the personality of the historian, its ability to produce a work of personal integrity against all odds; see Mutschler 2008b for an interesting comparison of Tacitus and Sima Qian, though perhaps stressing differences too much. To be sure, Tacitus draws on a republican tradition of politics; but it does not really function as a specter holding out an alternative constitutional order to the reader, and while Sima Qian is confined within a monarchical conception of statehood, that does not prevent him from pitting two alternative versions against each other, the dictatorial Qin and the clement Han.

Far from a subversive form of knowledge, in both our empires, preimperial political philosophy served as a vehicle for developing a new discourse where monarch and elite could engage to debate their roles.⁷⁴ One model that Roman and Han elites never seem to have tired of impressing on the ruler was that of impassive, exemplary kingship. This was a moral issue, a question of character.⁷⁵ One parable, found in the speeches of the Hellenic orator Dio Chrysostomus, simply saw kingship as a test of personality. When Zeus had to decide whether his son Hercules was fit to rule among humanity, he had him ascend a steep mountain with twin peaks. At each top a woman was seated, one embodying true kingship, the other tyranny. Afterward, Hercules was asked which of the two he liked best. His fitness for rulership was proven by his preference for the noble, dignified, yet less glittering, female who represented proper royalty.⁷⁶ Another way of presenting this opposition is found in the tragedy *Octavia*. There we meet the emperor Nero cast in the role of the tyrant, a ruler totally in the grip of his own desires and fears, a slave to lust, pleasure, and murder. Pitted against him, in one of the key passages, is his teacher and philosophical adviser, Seneca. Duty, justice, and service to the people are the values that the Stoic philosopher is made to hold up as the ideal for Nero to follow by the anonymous playwright.⁷⁷ The echoes here of the views committed to writing by the real historical Seneca are unmistakable. One of the most famous contributions to the classical literature on kingship is his speech "On Clemency" as the quintessential royal virtue. Addressed by the prominent member of Roman court society to his pupil the young emperor Nero, the text is one long celebration of the king as a moral example and savior of men. Mildness, moderation, and leniency, these are among the ruler's qualities whose praises are sung in one simile and fable after the other. The emperor ought as far as possible to leave his sword unsheathed. Punishment should only very reluctantly be exacted from the enemies of the *princeps*. Like the stingless ruler of the beehive, the Roman Caesar would have a much better hand at governing if he tried to gain the affection of the population and make them follow him voluntarily; and the best way to do that was to do good and set a moral example through his own conduct:

The mildness of your character will be related among people and gradually be disseminated across the entire body of the empire; and everything will take shape after you. Good health comes from the head. It is from

74. See Noreña 2011 for a comprehensive survey and analysis of the discourse on virtues, vices, and exemplary kingship developing between the emperors and the elites of the Roman world.

75. MacMullen 1966: chapters 1–2, a book dedicated to a discussion of the enemies of the Roman order, saw clearly that the senatorial and philosophical critique of the emperors was confined to debating the morals and virtues of the ruler. Its practitioners were unable to suggest a convincing alternative to monarchy, which after all brought peace.

76. Dio Chrysostomus, *Oratio* 1.65–84.

77. *Octavia* 438–592.

there that everything is vigorous and erect or put down by faintness depending on whether the spirit is alive or wasting. There will be citizens, there will be allies worthy of this goodness, and throughout the world right morals will return. Everywhere your hands will be spared. . . . At last, vice, after having long abused its reign, will give way for a pure and happy age.⁷⁸

At the other extreme of Eurasia, Confucian advice to the Han rulers mirrors Seneca's Stoic thought to a surprising degree. Again and again, the fallen Qin rulers are taken to task for an intrusive style of government based on unilateral command and, even worse, dire punishments. One of the most eloquent statements in the literature of the Han Dynasty is from the honorable courtier Jia Yi in a famous essay on "The Faults of Qin."⁷⁹ He acknowledges that "from a tiny base, Qin had become a great power . . . but later became a laughingstock in the eyes of others." Among the First Emperor's mistakes was his cruelty to advisers who presented him with contrary opinions. "Often before upright words could be uttered, the body had met death." That was not the way of the good ruler, the admonishment asserted. He should concentrate on attending to the public rites and the demonstration of his supreme moral qualities. This was an all-time favorite and all-purpose piece of advice of Confucian literati that, so they claimed, would make the imperial court a beacon of virtue and the proper form of life, a shining example throughout the world that people would strive to imitate and to whose throne even the most distant people would wish to yield and submit: "If the ruler is benevolent, there will be harmony. . . . If he is just, the world will be submissive and all will honor him. . . . If he is lawful, everyone under Heaven will follow the correct path and no one will fail to support him."⁸⁰ Force, therefore, would only be little required to extend the sway of the prosperous, almost paradisiacal, peace of the Han emperor. With good morals, empire would take care of itself.⁸¹

Following on from this were also exhortations that the monarch would abide by his own laws. One story told of the emperor Han Wendi (r. 180–157 BCE) related how he at one time in a dramatic incident had nearly come to harm because of the careless action of a mere commoner. Infuriated, the ruler wanted the poor wretch severely punished. The commoner was apprehended and handed over to the commandant of justice, Zhang Shizhi. However, Zhang acted contrary to imperial expectation and only fined the culprit. At this point, the emperor began

78. Seneca, *On Clemency* 2.1.4 and 2.2.1 (in reverse order, authors' translation). On this work see now the introduction, translation, and commentary by Braund 2009.

79. This is in *Xinshu* 1.1a–b (DeBary and Bloom 1999: 228–31).

80. Jia Yi, *Xinshu* 3a–b.

81. Further on the ethical notion of empire, see the discussions of Nylan 2008; Mittag 2008; Yang and Mutschler 2008. Also see Mutschler 2008b for a broadly similar development in Rome, though with differences in nuance.

angrily to make complaints, but the official kept calm and reminded the emperor that he himself had ordered that a proper balance should be kept between crimes and punishments through careful examination of cases; trust in the laws would grow from equitable administration. The emperor yielded when further reminded of the principle that “the law is shared by the emperor and his people alike.”⁸² Such gestures of grace, moderation, and self-restraint were equally welcomed and praised by the Roman elite in their relations to the Caesars. The panegyric celebration of Trajan penned by the senator Pliny reached a rhetorical pitch in describing the assumption by the emperor of his third consulate. Unprecedentedly, Trajan had walked up like an ordinary incumbent in front of the presiding and seated consul to take the oath of office: “How can I praise this enough... that the *Principes* did the same as any private person, that the Emperor acted as if a subject.”⁸³ Roman jurists observed that “the prince was not bound by the laws,” but frequently added that it was nevertheless a sign of good governance if he chose to behave as if he was. For “nothing was so becoming of empire than to live by the laws.”⁸⁴

The latter ruling was passed in a case involving a legacy to the emperor. But the testament was invalid and therefore ought not be insisted on by the monarch. It was a stock theme of the moral discourse on kingship that the ruler would not be self-serving, but should dedicate his reign to the welfare of the subjects.⁸⁵ This involved, as one of the most important concerns, an insistent demand that the ruler took great care to rein in his household servants and rely on his elites in the conduct of government. The palatial eunuchs and slaves were a continuous focus of elite criticism and jealousy.⁸⁶ The list of complaints against the despotic Qin Dynasty was topped by a charge that the successor of the First Emperor had been wanton and weak, a passive and increasingly disoriented tool in the hands of the chief eunuch Zhao Gao. Isolated from the honorable parts of society, the Second Emperor of Qin had indulged in gratifying his personal pleasures, lavishing money on a new palace, women, and other amusements while leaving the realm

82. Ban Gu, *Hanshu* 10.2310 (Zhonghua punctuated edition.). Ban Gu’s account is fuller in this case, which is also referred to in chapter 23 on law and punishment in Han. Zhang Shizhi was an unusually honorable official, at times even attempting to bring members of the imperial family to justice—with mixed results. See Turner 2013 for tensions between bureaucrats and imperial kin. See also *Shiji* 102, in which Zhang demonstrated leniency by ordering the execution only of a person caught stealing from the grave temple of the previous emperor, instead of ordering the entire family of the thief killed, as the vengeful monarch desired.

83. Pliny, *Panegyric* 64.4.

84. Justinianic Code 6.23.3 (ruling of Alexander Severus); *Digest* 32.23 (Paul, *Opinions*). See Lucrezi 1982: 200–2 on the issue of emperors abiding by the laws, though in too constitutional terms (cf. the general observation of Crone 1989: 43. Monarchs were perceived as upholders of law, tradition, and divine order, and in that sense constitutional, yet there were “no formal institutions for calling them to account”). A very similar sentiment is found in the Han texts, some of which state clearly that law is the most important element in governing and that the emperor must obey his own laws. See Turner 1992 for a discussion of rule-of-law ideals in early China.

85. Noreña 2011: 101–2 and 289.

86. See Dettenhofer 2009 for a comparison of eunuchs, and to a lesser degree freedmen, at the Roman and Han courts.

to the wicked machinations of his eunuch. That was a certain recipe for disaster, in the eyes of the elites.⁸⁷ From their perspective, the moral fiber and political order of the realm was being undermined. A matching catalogue of highly trusted servants, usually freedmen, vilified in aristocratic literature can easily be produced from Rome. They tend invariably to make up a colorful sideshow to the gory, but fascinating script of bad emperors that Roman historians have dedicated to posterity. In both our cases, the burning issue was that from the perspective of the regular officeholding classes, eunuchs, slaves, and freedmen constituted a transgressive phenomenon. Their elevated position close to the emperor represented an affront to the established hierarchy of status and a challenge to ordinary relations of power.⁸⁸ It was, therefore, of pivotal importance for the honoratiore to assert themselves against their “servile” rivals. This happened as a regular warning to the ruler not to allow his trusted personal servants to impose themselves as an impenetrable veil between the emperor and (elite) society. The ruler should remain accessible to the leading people and ought to involve the eminent classes in running the empire. Rather than merely relying on his household and serving his own interests, the good monarch would make sure to select what in Greek parlance would be “the aristocrats,” that is “the best men,” those who stood out in society. These were the ones to whom the ruler should lend his ear, entrust the tasks of government, and reward with honor, rank, and offices.⁸⁹

To keep one’s personal staff on a tight leash was only one dimension in the general management of the imperial household. Another, no less significant topic that the elites rarely tired of lecturing the emperors on was economy in spending.⁹⁰ But this advice was not given unambiguously. Tightfisted policies should best not come at the expense of largesse showered on the prominent sections of society. The tensions in the elite position are clearly revealed in a speech that the historian Herodian put in the mouth of Pertinax to proclaim a new order after the fall of Commodus, the self-indulgent tyrant. On his accession Pertinax had found the coffers of the realm empty and it was, therefore, difficult to play the expected act of the benevolent, generous lord:

They disparage such a policy by calling it parsimony and mean living, little realizing that such great and indiscriminate generosity could only

87. *Shiji* 87 (Nienhauser vol. 1: 335–57) pairs the Legalist first minister Li Si with the eunuch Zhao Gao’s despotism and moral corruption. On eunuchs in Han government, see Van Ess 2007.

88. In addition to Dettenhofer 2009, we point to the classic analysis of Hopkins 1978: chapter 4 and of Millar 1977: 69–83.

89. See Dio Cassius 52.19.2–3, 52.25.4, 73.12–13 for one hostile portrait of an influential and corrupt freedman inserting himself between emperor and elite, here Commodus’s Cleander; Sima Qian in *Shiji* chapter 95, Gaodi being admonished by the minister Kuai not to lock himself up in the palace with his eunuch, but make himself accessible to his ministers, and chapter 101 with Emperor Wendi sending his eunuch Zhao Tong down from his wagon, after advice proffered by Yan Ang that only the eminent should be allowed the honor of driving with the ruler in his carriage.

90. Walker 1978 remains one of the best discussions of the ideology of economizing husbandry, in the Roman case.

have been possible by forced confiscation. Nor do they realize that, if every man is to get what he deserves systematically but without any injury to persons or an illicit source of funds, one learns to economize sensibly on the readily available sources of supply.⁹¹

Worse than meanness were attempts to make good a shortfall in imperial income through forced confiscations of the landed estates of the aristocracy. To move away from the capricious ways of tyranny and Commodus, moderation in spending was necessary. That would lay the foundations for a rule truly based on “the best men” in the realm who would rest secure in their property. Further to confirm his commitment to the interests of the landowning classes, Pertinax, in the version of Herodian, announced that anyone who took up the cultivation of unused land would keep the tenure, even if the land had belonged to the wide-ranging estates of the emperors. This was an open invitation to an elite that often locally administered the property of the imperial state. As a final gesture, a number of new minor taxes introduced under his spendthrift predecessor were annulled. A good emperor did not create new taxes, but preferably remitted the arrears of past decades. Such was the shape of a royal program supposed to appeal to the landed elites of the Roman world, but also of one that would have resonated no less well with the sentiments of the Chinese gentry. One of Gaodi’s first pronouncements to his new subjects promised to reduce taxes and simplify the laws of Qin.⁹²

It is an interesting paradox of Han imperial history that it was under the tutelage of the emperor Wudi that Confucian learned people seem to have gained a decisive advantage over their rivals. Yet Wudi was possibly the most active and militarily vigorous ruler of the dynasty. During the early years of his successor’s reign, the expansionist policies of Wudi came up for review; they took a heavy toll on state finances and the new ruler asked his advisers for counsel. The differing positions on Wudi’s policies may be gleaned from a literary construct, the *Discourses on Salt and Iron*. Written by the scholar Huan Kuan in the following decades, the tract pretends to reproduce the ensuing debates at court between government ministers and Confucian literati:

The land comprises a variety of harmoniously blending climates, and produces all manner of things. To abandon these as we are doing, and seek for conquests beyond the frontier in an attempt to expand more into the sterile land of bitter cold, is like forsaking the fertile valleys . . . to till on the uplands or in the reedy marshes . . . The stores of the granaries are trundled out, and the riches of the treasuries scattered to the winds, that the needs of frontiersmen may be met. The Middle Kingdom is in the throes of forced labor and levies.⁹³

91. Herodian 2.3.9 (Whittaker’s translation in the Loeb Classical Library).

92. See *Shiji* 8.362–3 (Nienhauser vol. 2: 38–9); Herodian 2.3–4.

93. Gale 1931: 90. Gale’s introduction and translation of this text is still very useful. See also Brennan and Scheidel in this volume, chapters 2 and 5.

Expansionist warfare against nomadic tribes, went the Confucian objection to the leading minister, beggared the core of the empire. New taxes, extraordinary levies, and corvée duty, the whole gamut of impositions could be avoided if less aggressive policies were pursued and the broader population allowed to reap the fruits of peace. Fields would be cultivated and the realm prosperous, if the emperor made sure to keep taxes low and stable.⁹⁴ None of these moralizing admonitions seem particularly realistic pieces of advice, if taken literally (after all, empire can hardly be maintained on a formula that boils down to good morals of the ruler and minuscule taxation). Nor could these prescriptions be said to be uniformly supported by all elites. Some of them, it must be remembered, were occupied with effectuating Wudi's military ambitions and fiscal requirements. The same goes for Rome; it is noteworthy that Dio Cassius, a Roman senator and Greek historian writing in the early decades of the third century CE, should have imagined that the imperial finances could be based mainly on selling most of the property of the state and lending the money out on interest, and only then supplemented with modest taxation to make good any deficit.⁹⁵ This at a time when the imperial coffers seem constantly to have fallen short of needs, the coinage had undergone progressive debasement, and emperors were forced to find new ways of raising income.⁹⁶ The same elites that criticized their emperors for confiscating the estates of their peers also rarely refused to receive grants of land from the ruler or refrain from participating in the often brutal factional politics at court where the winners would move in to pillage the estates of the losers.⁹⁷ The strong arm of the imperial state was used and staffed by the imperial elites even as they celebrated the ideal of moral, exemplary kingship. Legalism and its methods, as is often observed by historians of China, remained indispensable to the Han Dynasty while it turned conspicuously Confucianist.⁹⁸ But realism is beside the point;⁹⁹ the moral discourse on kingship served as an efficient means to assert the status and privileges of the "honorable" sections of imperial society. As such it became a powerful vehicle for the formation of cosmopolitan empire-wide elites and identities.

It is striking, for instance, when reading through the pages of Sima Qian how a cosmopolitan vision of the imperial elite emanates from the pages and is read

94. Confucian writers disdained merchants and markets—and during Han times and later this prejudice was institutionalized with sumptuary laws, strict control of trade, heavy taxation, and prohibitions from taking the civil service examinations. See Nishijima 1986: 574–91.

95. Dio Cassius 52.28–9.

96. See Eich 2005 for fiscal-military pressures making reforms necessary to increase extraction. See Pong-tung 2009 and Howgego 2009 on the imperial coinage and the progressive debasements accelerating in the later phases of the principate.

97. See Millar 1977, especially chapter 4, for an analysis of the confiscation and redistribution of property in the Roman Empire.

98. For the intellectual climate of the Han court, see Lewis 2007: 202–26.

99. See Nylan 2008: 60, noticing how the Chinese court engaged in increasingly elaborate and expensive display while partaking in the Confucian discourse on economy and modesty.

back into the preimperial past. Officeholding and learned men travel between rival courts in search of patronage and occupation within the area that became the empire. The biography of Li Si, the astute and manipulative minister of the Qin emperors, even articulates a forceful cosmopolitan elite ideology. Hailing from outside the kingdom of Qin, Li Si is presented as having to face opposition from rivals native to the realm who tried to have him ousted as a foreigner. But an eloquent speech, undoubtedly Sima Qian's literary construction, persuades the Qin ruler of the advantages of using men drawn from all over the empire, in that sense prefiguring the rise of the provincial elites that brought the Han Dynasty to power:

Now in fact you are getting rid of the black-headed people so as to provide a resource for enemy countries, and you expel aliens so as to build up the strength of the feudal states [i.e., the opponents of Qin]. You are causing public servants from all under Heaven to hold back and not venture to turn their faces towards the west, to halt their feet and not enter Qin. This is what is called 'contributing weapons to brigands and presenting provisions to robbers'. Now articles which are valuable although not produced by Qin are many, and public servants who wish to show their loyalty although not brought up by Qin are numerous. If you now expel aliens so as to provide a resource for enemy states and reduce your people so as to increase your foes, then you will not only be making yourself empty at home but also sowing the seeds of resentment in the feudal states.¹⁰⁰

A similar-sounding set of reflections were advanced by the Roman emperor Claudius in a famous speech advocating to the assembled senators that deserving people from the provinces be admitted in their midst:

Of course, breaking with the past, the deified Augustus, my great uncle, and my uncle Tiberius Caesar wished the whole flower of the colonies and the municipalities everywhere, that is, the men of worth and wealth, to be in the senate house. But what then? Is not an Italian senator to be preferred to a provincial?... [N]ot even provincials, provided they can be an ornament to the senate house, do I think ought to be rejected.... Indeed with hesitation, conscript fathers, have I gone beyond your customary and familiar provincial boundaries, but even haltingly the case for Gallia Comata must be made.¹⁰¹

100. *Shiji* 27.43–4, Nienhauser vol. 7: 338–9; see further *Shiji* 87. The square brackets are our explanatory parenthesis. On the cosmopolitan development of elite discourse in the Han Empire, see Beecroft 2010 and Weber-Schäfer 1968, who talks of an ecumenical "Ziviltheologie."

101. Sherk 1988 n. 55. For an analysis of Claudius's speech, the famous extract of Aelius Aristides (n. 105 below), and the inclusion of provincial elites in the Senate, see Hopkins and Burton 1983: 184–9.

As in the Chinese example above, not everyone favored the co-optation of eminent foreigners in the ruling class. Claudius's speech evoked considerable resentment among some senators. His motion was, of course, passed in the Senate. But the decision did not pave the way for an immediate flood of Gallic senators, only a small trickle.¹⁰² Nevertheless, several advantages accrued to the emperors from admitting more provincials to imperial offices. Not only were they able to recruit the membership of the ruling class from a bigger pool and attach to their courts the most influential and powerful from a wider geographical expanse and thus harness their resources to the cause of empire, but it also made them less dependent on old, prominent families. These, on the other hand, in spite of their misgivings as a group, ended up individually colluding with the emperors in gradually including a significant number of provincial families in the imperial elite. This happened when they in the process of governing the realm forged networks of clientage with strong provincial families that they would then seek to advance to membership in the Senate and thus strengthen their own position as powerful patrons.¹⁰³ As a result of this, the Roman Senate was gradually transformed over the two centuries of the principate finally to include more provincials than families of Italian descent. Elite networks broadened in geographical scope and began to propagate a cosmopolitan understanding of the Roman peace: "he did not take away their Roman citizenship because they were also concerned about their Jewish status."¹⁰⁴ This was Philo, a Jew living in Alexandria, claiming in Greek that Augustus, the ultimate precedent, had approved that people could be both Roman and Jewish at the same time. Here follows Aristeides, a Hellenic orator hailing from Asia Minor, eulogizing the empire and the extension of Roman citizenship to our *honoratiores*:

Dividing into two groups all those in your empire—and with this word I have indicated the entire civilized world—you have everywhere appointed to your citizenship, or even to kinship with you, the better part of the world's talent, courage, and leadership, while the rest you recognized as a league under your hegemony. Neither sea nor intervening continent are bars to citizenship, nor are Asia and Europe divided in their treatment here. In your empire all paths are open to all. No one worthy of rule or trust remains an alien, but a civil community of the World has been established as a Free Republic under one, the best, ruler and teacher.¹⁰⁵

102. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.23–25.1; see Garnsey and Saller 1987: 8–12 on the slowness and unevenness of integration of provincials in the Senate. In that respect, Claudius's speech did not introduce a revolution in recruitment.

103. See Saller 1982: 168–94 on the complex networks of patronage bringing provincials into the Roman Senate.

104. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 157 (our translation). See Sherwin-White 1973 for a discussion of the combination of Roman citizenship with membership in other political communities.

105. Aristeides, *To Rome* 59–60 (Oliver 1953). See Richter 2011 for the cosmopolitan development of elite discourse in the Roman Empire. Richter 2011: 131–4 treats Aristeides's celebration of Roman citizenship and Claudius's advocacy of admitting provincial nobles to the Senate.

The development of a cosmopolitan ruling-class discourse and identities as well as the inclusion of provincial elites in the ruling class is one area where our two empires show long-term convergence. But there were differences in articulation. The Roman was more culturally and linguistically composite. While Latin language and literature constituted the basis in the western provinces, an alternative canon of Greek-language works was cultivated in the eastern provinces. By contrast, the Chinese imperial court seems to have been able to promote a more uniform organization of high culture after reforms under the first emperor established one standardized script, which quickly superseded local and regional alternatives. The nature of the Chinese language, in which pictograms carried meaning that transcended local spoken dialects, allowed officials throughout the empire to use standardized forms and procedures for receiving orders and reporting to superiors.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Chinese pictograms tolerated considerable linguistic variation in spoken language, so the contrast may in fact be too strong. The Roman case may even suggest that perhaps we ought to take a more gradualist view of Chinese unification and expect considerable regional differences in the degree of integration of elites.

4. FINAL REFLECTIONS

Three decades ago, Keith Hopkins and Graham Burton made a passing comment about some “remarkable” similarities between the first emperor of China and of Rome, not least in the choice of title. The semantic contents of Huangdi and Augustus signified virtually the same: elevated, numinous, supreme lordship.¹⁰⁷ In this chapter, we have tried to argue that such parallels are no accident. In fact, they can be taken even further. It is extraordinary how the myths of both the Roman principate and of the Han Dynasty elaborated a preimperial past to present an image of monarchy appealing to elite sentiment. Obviously such commonalities were not the result of any direct borrowings; culturally the traditions were distinct. Rather, the parallels reflect the logic of the situation: shared organizational constraints and broad similarities in the constitution of society, the structure of power, and processes of elite formation. In putting the emphasis on similarities, we have been going against the inclination of much humanist research, which has tended to stress the unique features of societies and therefore privilege the culturally specific or what Clifford Geertz dubbed local knowledge. In that tradition, comparison serves as a tool to isolate and distinguish the particular. Identification of broad similarities, on the other hand, is accepted only hesitantly, at most as provisional points waiting to be broken up by further

106. For studies of the link between empire, authority, and literacy in China, see Lewis 1999.

107. Hopkins and Burton 1983: 120 n. 1.

analysis.¹⁰⁸ “Yes, but surely it was more complex,” would be a habitual response by observers working within this tradition when confronted with claims about commonalities. Frequently, they will instead prefer to have recourse to an argument based in philology. One might, for instance, start from the observation that the Chinese did not have the word “empire”; *Tianxia*, all under heaven, had slightly different connotations.¹⁰⁹ But that is little different from Rome. “Imperium” is not strictly identical with the modern sociological and analytical concept of empire either. In short, there is a real risk that nominalism will crowd out analysis here in the desire to emphasize, even celebrate difference and complexity. The scholar may simply end up stating the obvious, in this particular case that Latin was not Chinese and vice versa.

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, we do not see the two approaches as mutually excluding alternatives, but as complementary; they serve different purposes. If one were to visit the court of the Han emperor it would clearly be an advantage, not to say crucially important, to be conversant in the language and etiquette of the palace. Such intricate, local knowledge would allow you to participate as actor. But if we change our perspective and start looking for the collective patterns emerging out of the interaction at court of many people, then it may be more fruitful to note how courts have often used etiquette and high language as strategies to domesticate elites. Observing societies from a distance may yield no less valuable insights than adopting the position of an insider. From that perspective, stressing instead the particular customs of each court might well end up turning the thick description of useful local knowledge into what is now commonly referred to as the narcissism of small differences—at the cost of occluding the general analytical point. It is true, as Geoffrey Lloyd has recently remarked, that there is an inherent risk of ethnocentrism in every act of comparison. But, as he continued, that is even more the case with studies of single societies. There is no Olympian position, no completely neutral point from which to study societies. Failing that, the best we can do to overcome the limitations of our cultural horizon is to engage in conscious comparison, to take one step back from our societies and seek to identify common patterns and shared developments.¹¹⁰ It is with that ambition in mind that we have embarked on this interdisciplinary endeavor, to bring the two distinct experiences of Rome and Han China into dialogue with each other, to see Rome from a Chinese perspective and China from a Roman.

108. Mutschler and Mittag 2008: 421–47, for instance, represents an instructive, and valuable, contrast to the analytical style adopted in this chapter: “At the same time, however, one observes that the degree of convergence varies, since beneath the surface the original differences continue to be effective” (441). While similarities are noted, differences are constantly reemphasized. Thus they also see a much greater contrast than we do between the principate, the need to “disguise” the monarchy in republican form, and the more absolutist Chinese imperial monarchy. But, of course, in their analysis the focus is shaped by the short-lived Qin Dynasty rather than the Han (see 437, 443).

109. See Nylan 2008: 42–3, otherwise a very interesting analysis.

110. Cf. the discussions of Lloyd 2011a and 2011b.

Toward a Comparative Understanding of the Executive Decision-Making Process in China and Rome

T. Corey Brennan

My subject is official decision making, and more specifically, what one may call the “deliberative habit” as it pertained to decision making in ancient Rome and Han China. This comparative topic is not an easy one. For the ancient Mediterranean world, “the issue of decision making per se is not widely studied from a theoretical, model-building perspective,” observes Joonas Sipilä, in the introduction to his recent work on Roman provincial territorial rearrangements.¹

As it happens, Sipilä’s study now offers the best succinct treatment of patterns of imperial decision making relating to territorial organization, as well as some welcome insight into the executive decision-making process in general, from the reign of Augustus to the early seventh century CE. Yet a comprehensive study of Roman governmental decision making does not exist—even for just the Republic, a period for which the epigraphic sources still remain manageable. For Rome’s emperors, Sipilä notes that the “thoroughly reactive” style that Fergus Millar a generation ago derived from a massive assemblage of the sources still dominates the scholarship.²

It would be inconceivable for a Romanist to even start thinking about decision making in Han China were it not for the efforts of Enno Giele. In 2006 Giele published his *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong’s Duduan*. The polymath Cai Yong lived from 133 to 192 CE; his *Duduan* (to be translated as “Independent” or “Aloof Assessments,” i.e., of the emperor) is just one of many works on diverse themes attached to his name.³ Giele’s basic approach is to take the *Duduan* handbook (which strikes one as a mixture of descriptive and prescriptive material) and compare its contents to the practices of communication and consultation attested in Han historiographic and epigraphic sources.

1. Sipilä 2009.

2. Millar 1977. The quote is from Sipilä 2009: 5. For an expansive case-study approach to the subject, see now Hicks 2011.

3. See Giele 2006: 14 n. 14 for bibliography on Cai Yong’s career and scholarly activities.

Giele's immensely detailed philological and historical study is an important step forward in understanding the characteristics of procedure and discussion in Han court councils, as well as the larger question of the mechanisms of communication to and from Han subjects, downward and upward. Romanists will be reminded at practically every turn of Millar's 1977 *Emperor in the Roman World*. Giele's book sits comfortably next to that tome, but takes the student of Greece and Rome into entirely new territory with its disquisitions on "[i]ndentation as a form of respect," "[c]lassified information forwarded in black pouches," and "[p]olite 'stupidity.'"⁴ At the end of it all, a Romanist is likely to come away with a new appreciation of the subtlety and complexity of Han imperial rhetoric and political processes, but also with the feeling that the advice customs of both republican and imperial Rome offer numerous points of contact with those of early China.

To start a comparison between these significantly different cultures, one could do worse than to examine two cases concerning the management of foreign affairs from the mid-130s BCE. The first has to do with Rome's republican empire expanding east, the second with the Han court looking to the security of its northern frontier.

It was not deliberation that set in motion Rome's decision to annex the Kingdom of Pergamum in western Asia Minor and form a new province of "Asia." Indeed, these developments were virtually forced on its Senate. For that, one can thank the actions of Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, tribune of the Plebs for 133 BCE. When a Pergamene embassy arrived in Rome to announce the terms of the will of Attalus, the last king of Pergamum, Tiberius (who had a hereditary link with the kingdom) was the first to know. He then quickly brought a bill to the particular popular assembly where he could preside—namely, that of the Plebs—which provided that Attalus's money fuel one of his domestic reforms, a far-reaching agrarian bill.⁵

Among other things, the Plebs' vote demolished the possibility of measured debate in the Senate on whether or not to accept the bequest. Just two decades previous the Senate had turned down an opportunity to annex the Kingdom of Cyrene in North Africa. If given the chance, it might just have done the same to this bequest. The limitless possibilities for self-enrichment and the acquisition of foreign clients made the annexation of the Pergamene kingdom attractive to individuals, but potentially destabilizing for the state as a whole. In fact, Rome at this point simply did not have enough qualified magistracies to send one out annually to govern it.⁶

4. At Giele 2006: 100–1, 168–70, and 193–4, respectively.

5. Sources in Broughton 1986: 493–4. The classic treatment of these events is that of Badian 1972.

6. Discussion in Brennan 2000: 222–3 (on the decision not to annex Cyrene and attractions of the Pergamene kingdom), and 239–46, 583–96 (on the number of *provinciae* outstripping available magistrates after the annexation of "Africa" and "Macedonia" in 146 BCE).

Perhaps this pragmatic consideration explains why it took some time for the Senate, the body of ex-magistrates that advised current magistrates, to urge the ratification of Attalus's will. We have an epigraphic copy of that very decision of the Senate (in Latin, *senatus consultum*).⁷ The presiding magistrate at the session at which this decree was passed (it can now be shown) was Publius Popillius Laenas, one of the two consuls of 132, and a scourge of the Gracchan cause. The calendar date? Sometime between August 13 and December 13. So the Senate hesitated—and presumably discussed the payoffs and pitfalls of annexation—for some time after Tiberius's death in July 133, for just over a year, before validating King Attalus's acts. So the process had been turned on its head: decision by popular vote first, followed by debate in an advisory council.

Han scholars will immediately note several jarring differences from the Chinese imperial situation: the audacity of Tiberius Gracchus in devising a revenue stream for his project before the Senate even had a chance to turn down his request, the presence of a popular assembly to effect a decision, and of course the ability of the tribune (whose office gave him sacrosanct status) to escape imprisonment or execution. Tiberius indeed was soon assassinated, but not directly because of this episode.

Problems inevitably followed with the formation of the new province of Roman "Asia"—not least, a potent armed insurrection that took three years to quell.⁸ One smaller issue on which by chance we are informed was a dispute over the tax liability of the city of Pergamum itself. Pergamum remained under republican rule a free and thus financially immune city. But that did not stop Rome's powerful private tax collectors from trying to exact payments on certain lands in its territory.

On this politically charged question we have an epigraphic *senatus consultum* "On the Pergamene Territory," which must date to 101 BCE. The document shows that a magistrate in Rome had to decide on "the land which was under controversy between the publicans and the Pergamenes," and that he came to his conclusion "on the advice of his *consilium*," or advisory council. The document contains fifty-five names, some perfectly well known but most otherwise not attested. These are senators who are not just witnesses to the drafting of the final decision (in Latin, *scribendo adfuerunt*). They must also have been the actual deliberating members in an ad hoc council that advised the relevant magistrate in the city.⁹

It is telling that one of the longest-lived commonplaces of Greek philosophical and philosophizing literature is the question whether the gods deliberate.¹⁰ Behind

7. Text and discussion in Sherck 1969: no. 12, 63–73 (but with date of "129 or 101" BCE for this inscription). For a discussion of the chronology that follows, see Brennan 2000: 232–5 and 671–3 (firmly dating the inscription to 101 BCE).

8. For the sources on this insurrection, which lasted from 132 to 129 BCE, see Broughton 1986: 504 (cf. 509).

9. See Sherck 1969: no. 12, lines 21–3, for the quotations in text above and lines 23–54 for the list of senators' names.

10. Still useful here is Stevens 1933.

this stands the given that man must deliberate, since he does not possess foresight. Indeed, for Greeks and Romans alike, by custom a leader was not supposed to make important decisions on any matter, private or public, without consultation of family, friends, trusted associates—and sometimes even qualified strangers.¹¹

For example, in the Greek Hellenistic period, every monarch maintained a highly structured council of “friends” to aid in deliberations. The importance of the institution can be seen in the well-known case of Antiochus IV, who was all set to invade Egypt in 168 BCE. when a Roman envoy—as it happens, the father of our consul Gaius Popillius Laenas—showed up carrying an unwelcome decree of the Senate to cease hostilities. The Roman then intimidated Antiochus out of seeking advice in his customary manner. He used a stick to draw a circle around the king, and then “ordered him to give his reply to the letter from within this circle,” without reference to his friends, which he eventually did.¹²

For Julius Caesar, being separated from his “friends” turned out not to be a fatal impediment for his decision making. Finding himself often too busy for consultative meetings, Caesar “[i]t is said . . . first figured out how to communicate with friends by notes, when, because of the volume of business and the great size of the city, a given occasion did not allow face to face conversation about urgent matters.”¹³

True, a few supremely self-confident characters are said to have dispensed with the tedium of deliberation, and leaped into action without sounding out advisers’ views. Such arrogant, autocratic behavior characterized the Roman rebel governor Sertorius’s descent into despotism. Losing control of the troops and allies who had helped him hold out in Spain for so many years (approximately 82–72 BCE), it is said:

He conducted capital cases without a council or advisers; in private he heard the evidence, and appointing himself sole judge, pronounced the sentences. He did not deign to invite his commanders to his banquets, nor did he bestow courtesies on his friends. In general, because his position was steadily growing worse, Sertorius turned into a beast and behaved like a tyrant toward everyone.¹⁴

In the end, those friends took it on themselves to invite Sertorius to a banquet, where they stabbed him to death.

The advice of a Roman advisory council, whether private or public, was in principle nonbinding on the person who convoked and presided over it. As noted,

11. On the ancient consultative habit, see Brennan 2001, where I offer a decidedly popular outline of what follows below.

12. Polybius, *Histories* 9.27.4–6. The incident is thoroughly discussed in Walbank 1979: 403–6. For a detailed and nuanced treatment of the institution of “friends” among the Hellenistic kings, see particularly Strootman 2007: 119–88.

13. Plutarch, *Caesar* 17.8; see Pelling 2011: 216 for additional sources and discussion.

14. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca* 37.22a. See further on this Konrad 1994: 207.

the Senate itself was the *consilium* of magistrates, though they might consult smaller *consilia*. For those, numbers lent weight. That is why we see that magistrate of 101 BCE putting together an advisory body of 55 (roughly one-sixth of the Senate, which at that time notionally numbered 300) to help him on the vexing question of Pergamene tax liability. The conference that Caesar called at Luca in 56 BCE should also be viewed as a “megaconsilium.” As Plutarch relates, the leading men of state came to that Tuscan town, including Pompey, Crassus, the commander in Sardinia, and a commander for Spain. In all there were 200 senators, with 120 lictors standing by holding the individual magistrates’ symbols of power.¹⁵

Or, in the private sphere, consider the remarkable case of Lucius Gellius (consul 72, censor 70 BCE), who “possessed near certainty that his son was guilty... [of] committing adultery with his stepmother and plotting the death of his father. Still, he did not rush at once to vengeance, but (instead) summoned almost the entire Senate to his *consilium*”—and after a quasi-judicial procedure, ended up acquitting the young man “not only by the verdict of the *consilium* but also by his own.”¹⁶

But sometimes quality trumped quantity. We are told that Lucius Sempronius Asellio, a reformist governor of Sicily in the 90s BCE, formed a *consilium* of just two advisers. One was a friend whom Asellio had brought from Rome, the other the most esteemed Roman he could find in the city of Syracuse: “These were the two men on whom [Asellio] relied, and having constructed adjoining houses to accommodate them, he kept them by him as he worked out the details of the administration of justice and devised means to further the rehabilitation of the province.”¹⁷

Though it took some self-assurance to go against the grain and reject a majority opinion—especially that of the Senate as a whole—it was perfectly legitimate to do so. Gellius’ quasi-trial, with its two “verdicts,” shows that as presider he could have disregarded his council. Yet Republican magistrates rarely did so.

Ignoring the Senate and relying solely on private advisers, however, was for much of Rome’s history not appropriate for public administration. That is said to have been one of the hallmarks of Tarquin the Proud (traditionally, 534–510 BCE), the last of the seven Roman kings, before the founding of the Republic in 510 BCE: “He was the first of the kings who dispensed with the traditional custom of consulting the Senate on all matters, the first who administered the government on the advice of his personal intimates. He made or unmade war, peace, treaties, alliances, just as he wished, without any authority from either People or Senate.”¹⁸

15. Plutarch, *Caesar* 21.5–6; for additional sources on the meeting at Luca, see Broughton 1986: 211.

16. Valerius Maximus, *Memorabilia* 5.9.1, on which see Johnston 2008: 28–9.

17. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca* 37.8.1–4. For further on Asellio and his family, see Badian 1968.

18. Livy 1.49.4–5 and 7, with Ogilvie 1965: 235.

Rome's emperors had a different issue concerning authority in their dealings with the Senate. As they amassed ever more power (both formal and informal), they found it tougher to get honest feedback from what was supposed to be their chief advisory council. By chance, we have preserved on papyrus a speech by the emperor Claudius (41–54 CE), where he takes the Senate to task for being too quick to pass a motion exactly as drafted:

Senators... remember that the opinion you state must be your own. For, Senators, it is not in the least appropriate to the majesty of the senatorial class that one man alone, the consul designate [i.e., the man traditionally first asked his opinion], state his view here following the motion verbatim, and that the rest of you speak merely one word, "I agree," and then on leaving say, "We *did* speak".¹⁹

In truth, by Claudius's day, Roman emperors had off and on been transacting the real business of the state in a sort of "executive committee."²⁰ It was Augustus, the earliest Roman emperor (31 BCE–14 CE), who first attempted to institutionalize the notion of a probouleutic "privy council." He took as advisers a cross section of chief magistrates and (on rotation) fifteen senators, and used them to prepare business to go before the Senate as a whole. But the experiment of such a standing committee soon foundered. Augustus's successor, Tiberius, abandoned the time limit for its membership. Before long the "privy council" returned to the ad hoc character of republican magistrates' *consilia*. But it also enhanced its competence to go far beyond *probouleusis* and instead to extend over practically all affairs of state, succinctly summarized by a late imperial biographer as "justice, routine administration, and military policy."²¹

In general, Rome's emperors exercised their judicial functions, formulated new laws, and saw to the routine and not so routine tasks of government on the advice of a *consilium* that consisted of handpicked "friends" (*amici*)—called "companions" (*comites*) when on the road.²² In this the praetorian prefects, that is, the commanders of the imperial bodyguard, usually had something approaching an ex officio place. The leading jurists of each age did too, with real professionalization of their role—that is, regular attendance by practically all of Rome's chief legal experts—initiated by Hadrian (117–38 CE). The emperor Septimius Severus (193–211 CE) took matters further, by fusing these two categories in the person of some unusually authoritative jurist-prefects: Papinian, Ulpian, and Iulius Paulus. But still Severus did not feel himself always bound by their advice,

19. *Berliner Griechische Urkunden* 611 column 3, lines 10–22. For fullest discussion of this harangue, see Stroux 1929.

20. The best discussion of the developments of the imperial period sketched below remains that of Crook 1955. See also Pani 2003.

21. *Historia Augusta, Life of Severus Alexander* 16.3 (on *ius, negotia, res militaris*).

22. For basic discussion, see Millar 1977: 110–22.

even in legal matters. Eventually, the institution of the emperor's *consilium* became fossilized (in the late third century with fuller development in the fourth) in a standing council known as the *consistorium*, which advised the emperors in matters of law, finance, and legislation.²³ That institution lives on today, in a way, in the papal consistory.

Some emperors—most notoriously Claudius—angered the aristocracy by allowing wives, imperial freedmen, and slaves to influence their decisions.²⁴ That had long been a standard charge in invective. For instance, there was a nasty rumor afloat that Cicero, while consul in 63 BCE, with his wife privately held trials of revolutionary followers of the renegade politician Catiline.²⁵ The historian Tacitus tells a similar story of the emperor Claudius as fact. An unusually distinguished public man, the wealthy Valerius Asiaticus, had landed himself in hot water with the emperor's court in 47 CE: "No trial before the Senate was granted him. It was conducted in the emperor's bedchamber, in the presence of [Empress] Messalina."²⁶

According to a particularly wild biography in the (late fourth century CE), *Historia Augusta*, the emperor Elagabalus went one step beyond, and instituted a *consilium* consisting exclusively of women, called here a *senaculum*, on the Quirinal Hill:

Under the influence of Symiamira [i.e., the emperor's mother, Julia Soaemias] absurd decrees were enacted concerning rules to be applied to matrons, namely, what kind of clothing each might wear in public, who was to yield precedence and to whom, who was to advance to kiss another, who might ride in a chariot, on a horse, on a pack-animal, or on an ass, who might drive in a carriage drawn by mules or in one drawn by oxen, who might be carried in a litter, and whether the litter might be made of leather, or of bone, or covered with ivory or with silver, and lastly, who might wear gold or jewels on her shoes.²⁷

Such discussions on ceremonial and sumptuary issues would not have been out of place in the Court Council of the Han emperor. Though in theory the emperor held complete control over state policy, rarely would he decide and see to the implementation of that decision without first consulting his ministers. One is reminded of the debate over the revision of Han protocol in 86 CE, where the emperor

23. See Crook 1955: 62–3, 65, and 67 on the praetorian prefects in the imperial *consilium*; on developments concerning jurists, 79 and 140; on Septimius Severus ignoring advice, 80; on the *consistorium*, 61–2, 96–8, 101–2, 104, 109, and 139–41.

24. For Claudius advised by wife and freedmen, see Crook 1955: 41–2, 116, and 119; more expansively, see Osgood 2010: 191–205.

25. Pseudo-Sallust, *Invective against Cicero* 3.

26. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.2, with especially Osgood 2010: 147–50.

27. *Historia Augusta*, *Life of Heliogabalus* 4.4, well discussed (with comparative material) in Hemelrijk 1999: 225–7.

in the end rejected the proposal of the superintendent of ceremonial, Ban Gu, to convene an ad hoc deliberative body of the leading specialists to explore the matter, which resulted in the academician Cao Bao doing the work by himself. Or the discussion of proper mourning practices for high officials first raised in 116 CE in the reign of Andi, with the twists and turns that followed for decades afterward.²⁸

But as promised, let us compare a pressing foreign policy question that confronted the Han administration about the same time as the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus. From 192 to 135 BCE the Han treaty with the powerful Xiongnu Empire of central Asia was renewed nine times, with “gifts” following to the nomads in each case. We are told that a court conference that discussed the question in 135 BCE, however, saw significant division on whether to maintain this expensive peace.²⁹ Emperor Wudi at first acquiesced in the majority opinion to continue the ongoing policy of *heqin* or “appeasement” (literally, “marriage alliance”). But the next year he was convinced to implement a U-turn of the dynasty’s long-standing policy, and to favor war—more specifically, an ambush on the Xiongnu. That plan had been suggested by a prominent man from the border town of Mayi.

Names are attached to each of the views espoused in the two relevant court conferences of 135 and 134 BCE. Han Anguo, the imperial counselor, argued against an expansionistic policy: “the wise and sage man regards the empire as being limited.” No gains could come from war with this difficult enemy, he said, citing past disasters and praising Wudi for not having added to his empire. Wang Hui, superintendent of state visits, argued against friendship with the nomads (whom previous treaties had not restrained from their incursions), and conveyed to the court the idea of that attack by ambush. The latter, who had firsthand experience as a border official with the nomads, would prevail. In the event, the trap failed, irrevocable hostilities broke out with the Xiongnu, and the suicide of the superintendent who advocated for the policy followed. Near-continuous campaigning continued down to 119 BCE, and indeed in other phases thereafter.

“I know of only one way in which you can be sure you have done your best to make a wise decision. You must get courageous men of strong views, and let them debate with each other.” So said Dwight Eisenhower³⁰—which, as noted, corresponds at least to the Han emperor Wudi’s ideal of how to get good advice in 135 and 134 BCE.

Nicola Di Cosmo rightly characterizes this as “an important political debate, marking the beginning of a new era not only in Han history but also in the history of the relations of China and northern nomads.”³¹ What comes across amply

28. On these cases, see for 86 CE Loewe 1986b: 296; for 116 CE, MacCormack 2006: 69–72 and the extended treatment by Brown 2008.

29. For what follows, see *Hanshu* 52: 2398–2403, with the exposition of Di Cosmo 2004: 210–5.

30. 1967 Columbia University oral history interview, cited in Thompson 1984: 111.

31. Di Cosmo 2004: 211.

in the relevant accounts (the *Hanshu* and *Shiji*) is the liveliness of the argumentation, with forceful use of historical exempla—many but not all reaching back to the remote past—to reinforce both points of view on the usefulness of substituting an offensive strategy for the previous pacific policy. Here the rhetorical use of the past, avoiding recent named exempla, is reminiscent of the approach in Greek and Roman declamation and Greek epideictic.³² Even allowing for significant creative writing on the part of our sources, what we get in this instance should reflect the general spirit of discussions in court councils on contentious points. The tradition in the *Shiji* that Wang Hui later (in 133 BCE) committed suicide³³ would certainly seem to support the historicity of this debate, and suggest that he had forcefully advocated for the expansionist position.

For further corroboration of the tenor of Han court debates, take the record of the *Discourses on Salt and Iron* of 81 BCE, which has come down to us thanks to an account written by Huan Kuan.³⁴ His work is a full sixty chapters, two-thirds of which detail the proceedings of an extraordinary court council in a dialogue form that has more than a passing resemblance to Thucydides's debate (5.85–113) between the Athenians and Melians.

Granted, the book may date to several decades later (ca. 50 BCE or so), and the debates may be “set pieces” on matters that by that point are closer to resolution. However, no matter what the date of the text, we as readers see what we are supposed to see: what debate looks like and how contentious it is, and incidentally how little role citation of the classics plays in it (contra the common wisdom).³⁵

In short, six years after the death of Emperor Wudi, the question came up whether to undo the government's monopoly of iron, salt, and alcoholic beverages. “An imperial edict directed the Chancellor and Chief Minister,” so we are told in chapter 1 of the *Discourses*, “to confer with a group of [over sixty] wise and learned men about the people's hardships.”³⁶ An unusually hot and free-ranging debate ensued (with the still-dangerous Xiongnu, perhaps inevitably, injected right at the start). But despite the fact that we see the reformist scholars getting much the better of the debate—allegedly even reducing the government officials to angry silence—it was the administration of Emperor Zhaodi that won the larger victory. In that regard it resembles Thucydides's Plataean debate (3.52–68), where the Spartan judges' decision on the fate of the city appears to be taken regardless of the opposing arguments presented at such length.

32. See in general Russell 1983: 107–9.

33. *Shiji* 108: 2863, with discussion in Nienhauser vol. 9: 283 n. 295.

34. There is a translated text of twenty-eight of the sixty chapters in Gale 1931, which is what I use here. For detailed discussion, see Wagner 2000: 18–32, with valuable previous bibliography at 18 n. 1.

35. As Michael Nylan has pointed out to me.

36. Gale 1931: 1.

One striking attribute of the salt and iron debate is the highly personal tone, where the government officials call the qualifications of the scholars into question, and vice versa. “Those who earn salaries of not more than a handful,” bitterly complain the ministers (ch. 16), “are not qualified to talk about government. . . . All the scholars are poor and weak, unequipped with necessary clothes and hats. What do they know about the affairs of the state and the business of the officials? They remain poor while criticizing the rich.”³⁷ That is precisely the point, retort the scholars, for the officials have been profiteering from the monopolies—a point that goes un rebutted.

But the decisions of 135 and 134 BCE on the Xiongnu do seem to hinge on the strength of the arguments presented. In the end, it seems that Wang Hui defeated his adversary because Han Anguo had been unable to demonstrate that *heqin* could actually guarantee peace. “That the emperor eventually followed Wang Hui’s advice,” Di Cosmo observes, “was because the *heqin* policy was no longer particularly effective, and even Han Anguo’s support for it was not particularly enthusiastic.” The prior experience of Wang Hui with troublesome nomads evidently gave him an edge in his debate. Indeed, even the “disastrous outcome” of an attempt at a limited military engagement “must have appeared as a confirmation of Wang Hui’s fundamental argument [that] [p]eace treaties with the Xiongnu do not work.”³⁸

There are plenty of parallels for such an administrative volte-face in the Han period. The successful general Ma Yuan offers a remarkable one in the first generation of the later Han, in the year 40 CE, when he initially failed from the field to get the executive council to agree to a revival of the minting of *wushu* coinage, but then, on his return, was able to convince the emperor of his view by skillful use of documentary evidence. (The fact that he had a close relationship with the founder of the Eastern Han Dynasty will have helped.) Indeed, for the earlier Han, the whole prolonged debate over the treatment of ancestral shrines that started in 48 BCE (and lasted forty years, by Michael Loewe’s reckoning) provides a cogent example of emperors personally deciding and redeciding on a difficult issue.³⁹

In the world of Greece and Rome, we see for all periods how some leaders put a premium on surrounding themselves with trusted advisers who complemented their own strengths and weaknesses, and listened closely when these individuals spoke. Others only sometimes aimed in their meetings to get conflicting points of view. For them, the usual idea, it seems, was to cover their backs in case things went horribly wrong.

37. Gale 1931: 103–4.

38. Di Cosmo 2004: 215.

39. For the decision on *wushu* coinage, see *Hou Hanshu* 24: 837 with Giele 2006: 145–6; cf. Nishijima 1986: 589. For the debate on ancestral shrines, see Loewe 2006: 99–100.

The year 117 BCE provides a majestically complex case of such decision making for the Han court, which Enno Giele explicates and analyzes at some length. It is the most famous instance for Han of the granting of investiture diplomas, namely, Wudi's enfeoffment of three of his sons, each born of secondary consorts, as vassal kings. There was a consequential policy dimension to all this. The whole tendency of the Han Dynasty from its inception was to aggrandize the power of the central administration at the expense of regional feudal powers. By Gaozu's death in 195 BCE he had eliminated most (but not all) semiautonomous positions. A serious revolt in 154 BCE by seven vassal kingdoms led to strong new central controls on these territories, now with direct administration by the center. In 127 BCE, Wudi himself got rid of the principle of primogeniture in vassal states, henceforth dividing principalities among all male heirs and thus weakening these kingdoms still further. So by 117 BCE the whole notion of enfeoffment and the granting of attendant prerogatives, even to an emperor's sons, ran very much counter to the spirit of the times.⁴⁰

The source is chapter 60 of the *Shiji* by the contemporary historian Sima Qian (?145–?90 BCE), with a later insertion by Chao Shaosun (104–30 BCE).⁴¹ The latter claims that he had recovered the investiture documents of the three princes “from elders and those who were fond of historical precedents.” The chapter, which Burton Watson in his translations of the *Shiji*⁴² did not include on the grounds that it was nonedited or only slightly edited, seems significant for precisely that reason. As it happens, Sima Qian himself praises the elegance of the relevant court documents; Giele for his part is able to exploit this unreworkeed text as a rich source for Han administrative language.

A larger point that emerges is the surprising complexity of the decision-making process (or rather processes). Michael Loewe identifies “15 stages” in a pattern in which the issue was “handed down to officials” by the emperor, then deliberated in council, memorialized, rejected, resubmitted to the council, reappraised, and so on, until the emperor's final ratification (*ke*) was given.

A remarkable royal decree preserved on papyrus⁴³ and only recently published, offers an unusually vital parallel to the Han emperor's stamp of approval. The document shows the court of the most famous Hellenistic queen of them all, Cleopatra VII, involved in a mundane matter of decision making in 33 BCE, then pronouncing her own *ke*. Here a wealthy Roman is being granted extensive tax and customs exemptions that affect both the imperial fiscus and “the private account of ourselves and the children.” The last line of the text is written in a different hand, reasonably supposed to be Cleopatra's own, enjoining “genesthoi,” that is, “so be it.”⁴⁴

40. On these developments in outline, see Bielenstein 1986: 509–11.

41. *Shiji* 60: 2105–2111; cf. *Hanshu* 59: 2749–50. For what follows, see Giele 2006: 225–32.

42. Watson 1993.

43. *Papyrus Bingen* 45 (now in Berlin).

44. On this document, see van Minnen 2000.

To this Roman historian, the investiture affair of 117 BCE seems stage-managed from the start. Giele, who analyzes the “whole series” as one that “can be broken up into six units, each of which consists of at least three parts,” essentially agrees: “In order not to go into history as a greedy and selfish monarch, [Wudi] had to comply with the tradition of *sanrang*, i.e., three times rejecting an offer of appointment, in this case not his own, but that of his sons.”⁴⁵

Hence the complexity of the exchanges. In this instance, members of the executive council, namely the chief minister (a nephew of Wudi’s empress, Wei) and chief prosecutor, trigger the whole process. Phase one: “risking capital offense”—a traditional formula in handing a memorial upward—the request is made to enfeoff three of the emperor’s sons as vassal kings. We are fortunate in having a date for this memorialization: the twenty-eighth day of the third month of 117 BCE. The imperial response came on the very same day. Wudi pointed out that his sons were commoners and that the rank of noble, not prince, was more appropriate for their circumstance.

Then we move to phase two: a new memorial, now from the executive council and three additional high officials, reporting that they had discussed the matter with the minister of the stables and other important bureaucrats. The date, despite this claim to further consultation, is apparently the next day, the twenty-ninth of the third month. The emperor responds that a reappraisal is needed, for a rank above marquis does not seem suitable. Phase three: that same day, the twenty-ninth, a new memorial, citing further consultation. The imperial reaction: “We approve only to give them hereditary positions as marquises.” Phase four: on the sixth day of the fourth month, a memorial reporting consultation with still more authorities—but here no imperial response. Phase five: a memorial of the ninth day of the fourth month, now claiming no wider consultation, but citing Gaozu as precedent. The ministers obviously were confident that this request would succeed, since they also request the determination of an auspicious date for investiture, and even the preparation of a map to show the location of the principalities.

This at last elicited the imperial *ke*. Then phase six—again a memorial, on the next day, followed by imperial response—is concerned with the technicalities of the investiture. Here there is even an implied phase seven, a promise in that memorial for a further memorial on the relevant rites and ceremonies. If that was delivered, it must have been shortly afterward. For what finally follows in our record are the imperial instructions (on the twenty-sixth) for publication of the documents, in language which is amply paralleled by the promulgation formulas in Roman statutes. And divination had determined the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month (= June 9, 117 BCE) for the actual investiture.

45. Giele 2006: 225, 230.

Enno Giele observes:

In a way...most imperial documents preserved in the orthodox histories do serve propagandistic purposes...[but] in the chapter of the “Three Princes”...a more sublime propagandistic effect is achieved by the combination of documents and events. In general, the Han emperors could use such a representation of the decision-making process to transfer responsibility for certain policies to the officials while still reaping the honors of having implemented them.⁴⁶

The rhythm of the series of memorials and reactions does seem effectively choreographed for this purpose—three rapid exchanges in the space of two days, then two more stretched over a period of almost three weeks, then quick implementation of the final imperial decree.

Often it was the emperor who initiated proceedings, by issuing a decree commanding court officials to address a contemporary concern over a matter of politics, finance, law, religion, military affairs, or a combination of the above. The enthronement of a new emperor, in case the previous ruler left no heir, allowed for a multiplicity of possibilities for initiation and initiative, even by powerful councilors. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, only with the founder and his son is there no succession issue, and so one has here a perennially vexing problem. Taking this problem from another perspective, the frequency of child rulers in Han history is implicit testimony for the importance of the Court Council as a force of continuity and stability. There family intimates will form the core group of senior advisers, with uncles on the mother’s side often rising to the fore as the most powerful councilors.

There was a rhetoric to the emperor’s initial decree, as Giele well illustrates. The emperor might blame himself for allowing such-and-such a state of affairs to occur, thus giving a green light (at least in theory) to his councilors to debate candidly on the problems at hand.⁴⁷ Or he might, as happened in 133 CE following an earthquake, enjoin his councilors to do so explicitly: “we command you each to search your minds and make plain where our faults lie, being in no way bound to refrain from mentioning matters otherwise banned from discussion.”⁴⁸

Those meetings seem to have had a formal mechanism for the expression of dissenting opinions, and a written record of them, which involved (as Giele shows, from the *Duduan*) either a restatement of the argument to be refuted and then the counterargument or, in the case of introducing a new point, “(I) would argue differently.” The *Duduan* continues: “Those (opinions) that match the throne’s

46. Giele 2006: 230.

47. Giele 2006: 214–5.

48. Loewe 2006: 100.

intention are responded to in writing with '[t]he opinion of such-and-such (the official's position) (named) so-and-so is approved.'"⁴⁹

An inscription detailing a judgment of the commander Lucius Caesius in Spain from 104 BCE provides one particularly eloquent parallel.⁵⁰ It shows that for Romans, consulting one's *consilium* and recording its decision, even outside the city, was perfectly normal. Two decades later, during his semiofficial campaigning in the east, Lucius Cornelius Sulla (consul 88 BCE, but now outlawed) engaged in the same type of consultations with unusual care when making territorial dispositions in 85 and 84 BCE. For Sulla it was especially important, in that as a (temporary) enemy of the Roman state he did not have access to the ultra-authoritative traveling commission of "ten legates" (*decem legati*) that were sent by the Senate at the conclusion of major hostilities and usually deliberated over such matters. Instead, he needed his arrangements ratified once back in Rome just on the strength of his personal *consilium*.⁵¹ This in turn created a new and ready and recent precedent, which spelled the death of the old-style *decem legati*. Though Lucius Licinius Lucullus (consul 74 BCE) used advisers in the early 60s at the conclusion of his campaigning in the East, Pompey in the late 60s BCE didn't see the need for the purpose of his acts in that theater (though he paid for it, for a time). In Gaul in the 50s, Gaius Julius Caesar used a clever dodge, by putting together a council of his own legates that just happened to number ten.⁵²

It is clear that in the top administrative circles of Han China as in Rome, advice giving is going on all the time. But calling a council is a special act. Unlike those of a Roman *consilium*, the Han council's deliberative sessions often did not include the emperor, and in the case of the investiture discussions he quite evidently kept his distance. In those discussions, we can see from Giele's study, the chief minister and chief prosecutor for their part progressively expanded their deliberating group to include "expert" ministers—for example, in phase two, the minister of memorial, minister of feudal relations, and an official representing the minister of ancestral worship, all of whom can be viewed as stakeholders in the issues. And it is clear how the process required the councilors themselves to hammer out the details of proposed policy. Formally, the emperor's role was simply to kick back what he did not like for reappraisal.

As in Rome, the Han emperor need accept the proposals of his councilors only by custom, not by law. Often we have a record of a majority opinion carrying the day in a court conference. We hear that Zhao Chongguo steadily had to

49. Giele 2006: 310–1.

50. *L'Année Epigraphique* 1984: 495, carefully discussed by Hoyos 1990.

51. Sulla's concern to show that in the field he engaged in due consultative process emerges clearly from the cumulative force of Sherk 1969: no. 17, line 9 (decree of the Senate confirming privileges Sulla granted to Tabae in Caria), no. 18, line 96 (Sulla's privileges to Stratoniceia in Caria), no. 20, lines 13–4 (his grants to Thasos), and no. 23, lines 39, 42, and 55–6 (privileges to the land of Oropus in Boeotia).

52. On the *decem legati*, the standard treatment is Schleussner 1978; in particular on Lucullus, see Morstein-Marx 1995: 303–4. For Caesar's dodge, see Brennan 2000: 810 n. 344.

build a majority there in the years 61–60 BCE to push across his novel proposal for establishing temporary military colonies on the frontier. Or in 32 BCE, Emperor Cheng, following the sentiments of fifty versus eight councilors, instituted the ceremonies of worship for the god of earth in the northern suburb of Chang'an. When in 5 CE Emperor Ping revisited questions concerning the cult, he did so on the unanimous opinion of an even greater number of councilors, first sixty-seven and then eighty-nine ministers.⁵³

There is obviously much more to be said about the importance of structured discussion in both Roman and Han decision making. Thanks especially to the efforts of Enno Giele, we are in a superb position to explore the Han imperial decision process in much of its subtlety, and then compare it, as best we can, to that of other administrative cultures, both ancient and modern. Of course, for all periods we are largely at the mercy of our sources. Historiographers, both Han and Roman, had quite limited firsthand access to “real” court debates and even then are naturally more interested in moments of crisis, interpersonal conflict, and high institutional stakes. Routine administrative decisions, even by a head of state, naturally fail to stimulate much attention or comment in our literary accounts.

Still, our information for the Han court is detailed and reliable enough to show some general principles at work, valid across even the long span of time under consideration (four and a quarter centuries, from 206 BCE to 220 CE). For instance, the emperor seems always, at least ostensibly, to initiate the actual deliberative process. The number of councilors participating in deliberations might rise in proportion to the importance of the matter at hand. Skillful introduction of precedents (avoiding those of the recent past) and even documents might help sway a debate. It was not uncommon for the emperor to revisit—sometimes repeatedly—what might seem a settled issue. And the councilors regularly put their positions—and sometimes their lives—on the line by advocating for or against such-and-such a policy. The expression “risking capital offense” found in memorials to the emperor was far from an empty formula, but rather a succinct statement of the realities of the executive’s power.

And even literary descriptions of a patently “scripted” decision-making process might yield valuable, unexpected data—such as the choreographed negotiations surrounding Wudi’s enfeoffment of his three sons just discussed. That incident happens to provide a detailed and useful chronology, namely of one month of rhythmic give and take between council and emperor from initial proposal to final executive decree. That offers a rough and ready guide for how long it might take for a Han emperor to resolve an issue where the outcome apparently was never in doubt, but where perceptions might matter.

53. For the discussions of 61–60 BCE, see Di Cosmo 2009: 73–5. For those of 32 BCE and 5 CE, see Wang 1949: 174.

Throughout this essay I have tried to underline the similarities—which are many and striking—between ancient Western and Eastern advice-giving processes and executive frameworks for the relevant eras. Overall, for both societies the mechanics of debate (sometimes obviously pro forma, but on many occasions, quite evidently free-ranging and fiery), and the obvious value placed on consensus or, failing that, simple majorities in the executive’s council, did serve an important function. Even though a council’s resolutions were in principle nonbinding on the executive, they did help brake overhasty decisions by the commander or emperor, curbed excessive influence by a minister or group of ministers, and provided external validation for the final decision and its implementation. Two glaring differences between Roman and Han practices: the expected formal absence of the Chinese emperor from his councilors’ deliberations; and (following upon that) the sometimes drawn-out interplay of memorial and response. The general impression one gets is that the Roman *consilium* debated most individual matters before it at one sitting (or certainly in a more compressed time frame), and that it was just the final verdict that prompted a written record.

Michael Loewe, in a valuable (and rare) comparison of Greek, Roman, and Qin and Han administrative systems, argues that the content of the debate in councils will have made for a further stark contrast. “In Chang’an and Luoyang,” he observes, “those who had arisen to the highest ranks of the civil service could present their own views and counsel to the emperor in private audience, and appropriate decisions would follow.” But “in Rome the views of the lower class of inhabitants might be presented for debate by the patricians of the senate.”⁵⁴ Loewe further explains the larger picture:

Whereas Qin and Han China had no concept of a citizen or citizenship, individuals in some of the Greek cities and Rome had acquired a sense of active membership of their community and took some part in its government. They might act as active members of an assembly, or as persons deputed by lot to hold some position of authority; or they might bear an acknowledged responsibility for representing the views of others and bringing them to notice. No organs of government or forms of social groupings of early imperial China could provide scope for such activities.

Of course, the Han system altogether lacked a popular assembly. In Rome, on the other hand, the rituals of republican-style *comitia* persisted well into the high empire. For example, the Roman People and Plebs passed legislation until at least the end of the first century CE. As late as the third century CE, the People continued to meet in electoral assembly—though largely ratifying the choices that the emperor had made for them. And at all points in the empire, Rome’s urban

54. Loewe 2006: 171 (also for quote that follows in text).

Plebs exhibited strong class solidarity and a remarkable persistence in asserting its privileges and prerogatives, real and desired.

Yet the very different political tradition in Han China did not yield precisely the results one might expect. Even as far as our sources go, in debates in Han councils the needs of the lower classes did seem at least occasionally to merit consideration. The arguments dated to 81 BCE in the *Discourses on Salt and Iron* make ample reference to economic hardships faced by the people. Similar discussion can be inferred from the decree of 179 BCE ordaining charitable relief of widows and orphans, and from a contemporaneous one ensuring the quality of popular grain disbursements; or from the court discussions of 133 CE addressing the suffering that followed an earthquake at Luoyang.⁵⁵ And that despite the ad hoc nature of these councils and their debates. In truth, despite their long tradition of enabling the expression of the popular voice in organized assembly, it does not seem that the Romans did much better than the contemporary Chinese in ensuring that the perspective of nonelites regularly found a hearing in their executives' councils.

The fundamental difference between the two systems lies elsewhere, and seems to be a matter not of substance but of representation. In a word, for the Romans decision making was at least in principle a viscerally collaborative process between council and executive, and in our sources is readily pictured as such. In the Han administration the reality of give-and-take between councilors and emperor was perhaps—for all our sources' emphasis on minute observance of protocol—not far distant from the Roman situation. But at the end of the process what mattered was the preservation of appearances. And specifically, what was important was the appearance of the *duduan*—that it was precisely the emperor's "independent" or "aloof assessments" that informed his regime's decision making.

55. Loewe 2006: 92–3, 100.

The Han Bureaucracy

Its Origin, Nature, and Development

Dingxin Zhao

THE Western Han Empire (206 BCE–23 CE) was the first long-lasting bureaucratic empire established on Chinese soil.¹ Beginning with a territory of roughly 1.5 million square kilometers, the Western Han Empire was gradually expanded in the early to middle part of the dynasty. Having 60 million people under its control at the zenith of its power, it was administrated by a bureaucracy consisting of over 120,000 officials. The Western Han bureaucracy, as well as the entire Han Dynasty political system, has enjoyed a paradigmatic status in the history of imperial China not only because China's later dynasties bore clear similarities with the Western Han, but also because the statesmen of the later dynasties were consciously aware of such continuities and actively evoked historical memories of the Western Han Empire in building, maintaining, and reforming the political systems and empires they lived in.

Before moving on, I must stress that the aim of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive account of the Western Han bureaucracy, but to highlight some key features of it, including its origin and development, its inherited problems, and its most distinctive characteristics that set it apart from the Roman bureaucracy.²

1. THE ORIGIN OF BUREAUCRACY IN CHINA

The Western Han bureaucratic system was modeled after the governmental structure of the short-lived Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE), which in turn had its origin in the Western Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1045–771 BCE) as well as Spring and

1. The Western Han and Eastern Han Dynasty (22–220 CE) are together called the Han Dynasty. While this chapter focuses mainly on the Western Han bureaucracy, I also draw examples from the Eastern Han Dynasty. The Eastern Han Dynasty was established by members of the Western Han royal lineage, and modeled after the Western Han political system.

2. Readers are referred to Bielenstein 1980; Bu 1996, 2002; Ge 1992; Liao 2005; Loewe 2006; and my own forthcoming book (Zhao forthcoming b) for other accounts of the Han bureaucracy.

Autumn (770–481 BCE) and Warring States (480–221 BCE) (SA&WS) period politics. To understand the nature of Western Han bureaucracy, we need to know its distinctive origins.

Historians and historical sociologists have argued very convincingly that war making has been a chief mechanism behind the rise of bureaucracy in the army and government.³ Applying this mechanism to the Chinese case, Edgar Kiser and Cai Yong⁴ argue that the precocious rise of bureaucracy in ancient China had also much to do with the prolonged and severe warfare that occurred during the SA&WS era. While accepting the general importance of warfare to the rise of bureaucracy, I also believe that warfare is not the only mechanism that can stimulate the rise of bureaucracy.⁵ As for the Chinese case, before the establishment of the Han bureaucracy, three waves of bureaucratization had evidently taken place: the emergence of bureaucracy during the mid-Western Zhou period, the spread of bureaucracy during the Spring and Autumn era, and the domination of bureaucracy in government during the Warring States period. Only the last one of the three waves was clearly propelled by the military competition of the warring states.⁶

During the Western Zhou Dynasty, as protection for the royal domain the Zhou rulers frequently sent out members of the royal lineage and their close allies to establish military colonies in strategic locations. Many of these military colonies later developed into semiautonomous dukedoms, hence laying the foundation of Western Zhou feudalism. At the same time, the Western Zhou royal house also kept a sizable territory around the capital region under its direct control. By the mid-Western Zhou period, some bureaucratic structures had developed in this royal domain. Sinologists have noticed various elements of bureaucracy during the Western Zhou Dynasty.⁷ Herrlee Creel⁸ stresses that the Western Zhou governmental practice of keeping written records was an important feature of its bureaucracy. Cho-yun Hsu and Katheryn Linduff⁹ argue that the development of the Western Zhou government was characterized by an increase in division of labor, expansion in the size of the government, and institutionalization of royal authority and hierarchy. Edward Shaughnessy¹⁰ argues that the Western Zhou government became evidently bureaucratic in the middle of the dynasty.

Was the above-mentioned development of the Western Zhou government a simple outgrowth of the administrative structure of a patriarchal state or a genuine

3. For instance, see Downing 1992: chapter 3; Howard 1976: 49, 64–9; Kiser and Cai 2005; McNeill 1982; Tilly 1992; Weber 1978: 291, 966.

4. Kiser and Cai 2003.

5. Zhao forthcoming b.

6. Zhao forthcoming b.

7. See Chang 2007a: 39; Creel 1970; Yang 1984, 2003: 315–35.

8. Creel 1970: 123–9.

9. Hsu and Linduff 1988: 249.

10. Shaughnessy 1999: 325–6.

emergence of patrimonial bureaucracy?¹¹ The question is important because when a patriarchal household became complicated, some kind of “administrative structure” would naturally develop.¹² To address this issue, let us first evaluate the nature of the Western Zhou administrative system against Max Weber’s criteria of an ideal typical bureaucracy: (1) it is hierarchically structured, (2) its operation follows rules and procedures rather than a person, (3) there is meritocratic selection and promotion of officials, (4) officials are compensated with a paid salary.¹³ My basic evidence is taken from Li Feng’s work.¹⁴

Li examines the inscriptions of sixty-seven unearthed bronze vessels that record Western Zhou appointment ceremonies. The result shows that the Western Zhou bureaucracy had a structure that was almost identical with the Han bureaucracy. By the mid-Western Zhou era, the Zhou government administration consisted of three separated functional divisions: royal household, civil administration, and military. Moreover, an unearthed mid-Western Zhou bronze vessel (*mugui*) also contained inscriptions which recorded that the king was worried about corruption and abuse of power by his officials and, therefore, appointed a person named Mu to take charge of the censorial duty.¹⁵ This could be the forerunner of the censorial system fully developed in the Han bureaucracy. Li also finds that during the appointment ceremonies, the proceeding was routinely held in the presence of the appointees’ superiors, and took place in the same offices (called *gong*) for particular administrative tasks.¹⁶ Even the Zhou king’s conduct during the appointment ceremonies was regulated by certain routines. In other words, at least during the appointment proceedings, the operation of the Western Zhou government seemed to have followed clear procedures, which met the second criterion of the Weberian bureaucracy. Li is also able to find that, as the Western Zhou government developed, fewer and fewer official appointments were hereditary in nature.¹⁷ It became a routine that the appointees started their careers very young at junior levels, and then followed a lengthy path of promotion across various government divisions (experiences in the military being a plus), and finally to the top of the government. The lengthy and in some cases complicated paths show that the Western Zhou government was hierarchical with layered ranks of officials. Also, as Li has very convincingly argued, if such a

11. Here, I define the patrimonial state as a form of polity that is ruled by one royal house. According to Weber 1978: 1006–69, the patrimonial state emerged from a patriarchal model of political domination. Although patriarchy is at the heart of patrimonialism, there are crucial differences between them, because patrimonialism “was a radical expansion and abstraction from the patriarchal structure” to the point that a patrimonial state could no longer allow the full functioning of autonomous clans and lineage leaders in the society: Eisenberg 1998: 92. See also Adams 2005: 16–9 for more discussion on the concept of patrimonialism.

12. Eisenberg 1998: 85.

13. Weber 1978: 956–1005. These are also the criteria that Kiser and Cai 2003 have used to distinguish bureaucracy from other forms of governance.

14. Li 2001–2, 2004, 2008.

15. Li 2007: 116–8.

16. Li 2001–2.

17. Li 2004.

lengthy and slow upward path “had been the normal pattern of promotion, experience and personal performance would have been considered very important factors in the government service of the Western Zhou.”¹⁸ Here, the hierarchical nature of the government and meritocracy satisfied the first and third criteria of the Weberian bureaucracy.

The Weberian bureaucracy is an ideal type that Weber constructed based on the major characteristics of modern bureaucracy. With some historical perspective, it is easy to understand that no premodern bureaucracy had features (or should have features) that exactly conformed to the Weberian criteria. The fact is that even modern bureaucracy does not meet all the Weberian criteria, especially at its top.¹⁹ Bureaucratization should, therefore, always be seen as a process. The Western Zhou bureaucracy operated under a lineage law framework (see below) and contained strong feudal and patrimonial admixtures. The official positions of the Zhou bureaucracy were only open to descendants of the aristocracy. There was also no indication that the appointed officials were compensated with salaries even though they were granted estates and occasional gifts by the king.²⁰ In other words, the Western Zhou bureaucracy was clearly a prebendal or patrimonial bureaucracy if we want to follow Weber’s terminology.²¹ Regardless of the terminologies, the Western Zhou bureaucracy contained all the essence and was the predecessor of the later patrimonial bureaucracy that developed during the SA&WS era and matured over the course of imperial Chinese history. In short, if one wants to consider the governmental structure of imperial China as bureaucratic, the governmental structure that developed during the mid-Western Zhou era has to be also qualified as a bureaucracy.

We still know very little about what led to the emergence of a bureaucratic form of governance during the mid-Western Zhou period. Based on the fact that most bronze vessels with appointment inscriptions were about the appointment of lower-level military “captains,” Shaughnessy suggests that such bureaucratic development could have begun in the military and then extended to the government administration.²² However, we should note that the Western Zhou bureaucratization process started some time before King Mu (956–918 BCE), a time when the

18. Li 2004: 18. In fact, Hsu and Linduff 1988: 251 have mentioned that in one of the appointment inscriptions, it was written clearly that the king appointed a person named Mien to the post of minister of works after examining “his record of performance.”

19. In the United States and all other Western countries, for example, the president or prime minister is democratically elected rather than bureaucratically promoted. Moreover, after the election, the chief executive usually has a huge number of government jobs available to award to his or her cronies.

20. Li 2001–2: 53; 2007: 142–7. According to Li 2007: 142–7, the Western Zhou royal house routinely bestowed land on the officials who served in the government as a form of compensation. By the late Western Zhou period, the land in the royal domain was no longer as available to be given away by the royal house, which contributed to the decline of the Western Zhou Dynasty. Yan 2002: 30 has shown very convincingly that even during the late Warring States period and in the state of Qin, where the bureaucratization process went the furthest, the privileges and gifts that each rank of officials could get were still of much greater value than the salaries attached to the official duties.

21. Weber 1951. But cf. Eich in this volume, chapter 4.

22. Shaughnessy 1999: 325–6.

war activities of the state were not visibly different from those in the other periods of the dynasty.²³ Weber once commented that the large territorial size of a state demands complicated administrative tasks and stimulates bureaucratic development.²⁴ However, the size of the Western Zhou royal domain was actually quite small, mainly limited to the Wei River Valley in present-day Shaanxi Province.

In this chapter, I venture to argue that the Western Zhou bureaucracy had its origin in the strong lineage tradition. Weber asserts that universalistic and achievement-oriented bureaucracy is the antithesis of particularistic, ascription-oriented, kinship-based organizations.²⁵ Yet in the Western Zhou case, the two antitheses reached a synthesis. To control the ducal houses established during military colonization and to regulate the relationship between them, the Zhou ruling house set up a system of ranked authorities based on patriarchal principles, which later historians called lineage law. Under lineage law, Western Zhou royal descendants were ranked in a multilayered hierarchical order by the concept of major lineage and minor lineages. While the Western Zhou king, who was normally succeeded by the eldest son of his primary wife, represented the major lineage, the rulers of the ducal houses (many of which were descended from the minor sons of the earlier Zhou kings) were minor lineages in relation with the Zhou ruling house even though they were the major lineages in their own territories. This kind of major-minor lineage relationship can be extended to incorporate various real or constructed collateral lines into a multilayered hierarchical structure, with each layer reproducing the power structure of the royal or ducal house on a reduced scale.²⁶

The formation of lineage law profoundly shaped the patterns of Chinese history. In most traditional societies, the state is a private entity belonging to the royal lineage, and state and family are not separated.²⁷ Under lineage law, however, not only is the state private to the royal family, the whole political order and all the social-political relations are seen as originated from lineage ethics and organized on the basis of lineage principles. Lineage law raised the importance of family in Chinese culture to such a level that it facilitated the formation of a different kind of religiosity among Chinese.

To reinforce the lineage law ideal, the Western Zhou instituted a complicated set of rites performed on various occasions, including (but not limited to) ancestral sacrifice, appointment ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and tributes, with

23. The reign of King Mu is the time when Western Zhou power was in decline. The conflict of the Western Zhou and the pastoral people started to become serious after the reign of King Mu. See Li 2006: 169. Sometime before then, however, the Western Zhou bureaucracy had already emerged.

24. Weber 1970: 209.

25. Weber 1978: 956–1069.

26. According to Von Falkenhausen 2006: 67, such splitting naturally “created a hierarchy based on kin seniority and genealogical distance from the focal ancestors.”

27. See Weber 1978: 1007–1110 and Adams 2005.

prescriptions as well for music and dress codes. Under the system, the dead must be buried in a way reflecting the ranked structure of kinship.²⁸ Only the eldest son of the major lineage had the right to hold ancestor worship ceremonies, the members of the major and minor lineages had to play different kinds of music in ceremonial proceedings, different ritual objects had to be used in the tombs of the aristocrats according to their ranks (which usually reflected the position of the aristocrat in relation to the royal lineage),²⁹ and when members of the major and minor lineages were together on ceremonial occasions their behavior was strictly prescribed by a complicated set of rites that reflected lineage law. The examples can be greatly extended.³⁰ Lineage law was the most important institution of the Western Zhou Dynasty.³¹

The highly hierarchical nature of lineage law and the complicated and rigidly rule-guided ritual proceedings are almost naturally bureaucratic. Since sacrificial activities (along with war making) were regarded as the central function of the state at the time,³² they must have had an impact on the structures of government organizations, which might have facilitated the precocious rise of bureaucracy within a largely patrimonial framework. Moreover, Western Zhou lineage law extended kinship relations to a very large circle, so large that it was able to incorporate the rulers and the people of the majority of the Western Zhou dukedoms into a network of real and fictive kinship. The extensiveness of the lineages formed as a result of the lineage law tradition not only made the internal hierarchical division of labor necessary but also left plenty of room for the development of the merit-based selection of government officials among the members of the same lineage, which must also have contributed to the rise of bureaucracy in Western Zhou China.

28. Chinese archeologists find that the spatial layout of the cemeteries, the design of the tombs, and the kinds of burial goods in the archeological sites dated from the middle to late Western Zhou period all closely follow descriptions of the received texts. See Hsu and Linduff 1988: 166–71, who suggest that the political order prescribed by lineage law might have been broadly applied at the time. Recent archeological findings also shed much light on the debates among historians. For example, historians have long debated the number of horses (either four or six) used to pull the chariot of a Zhou king. In Luoyang, a recently unearthed tomb belonging to one of the Eastern Zhou kings contained various burial objects, one of which was a chariot pulled by six horses. This find instantly ends the debate.

29. For example, regarding the use of bronze caldrons in the sacrificial activities and in the tombs of the aristocrats, the *Rites of Zhou* and several other ancient texts mention that nine were for the king, seven for the rulers of the city-states (dukes), five for ministers, and three for *shi* (the lowest-rank aristocrats). The number of bronze caldrons unearthed in the early tombs coincides with the description of the received texts. See Hsu and Linduff 1988: 193.

30. See Yang 2003: chapters 6–9 for an extensive discussion of lineage law and the rituals associated with it.

31. During the SA&WS, for various reasons (e.g., a specific branch of a lineage needed to be sent off for a military task or the size of the lineage grew too big), a lineage would split itself into several branches. By giving more power to the major lineage (i.e., the branch that held genealogical seniority), lineage law regulated the relationships between different branches of the same lineage after the split. See Du 1979: 27 and Hsu and Linduff 1988: 147 for the logic behind the formation of lineage law.

32. “Zuo’s Commentary (Zuozhuan),” (Cheng 13, 578 BCE) has recorded the following famous quote attributed to Liu Kang Gong: “Sacrifice and warfare are the two most important tasks of the state.” The quote is taken from the *Shisanjin Zhushu* (The annotated thirteen classics), Zhonghua Shuju edition, Beijing, 1980.

An indication of the family-based origin of Chinese bureaucracy is that most of the Western Zhou official titles were originally the names for different kinds of household managers. This legacy was maintained during the SA&WS era and further manifested in the Western Han bureaucracy. For instance, the chancellor was called *cheng xiang* in the Western Han era and generally *zai xiang* in later times. The Chinese character *xiang* literally means “assistant,” while *zai* means “slaying.” During the Western Zhou and SA&WS eras, the most important activities for the royal and ducal families were sacrificial rituals centering on lineage law, and the most important part of such rituals was the slaying of animals for sacrificial activities. Therefore, the title *zai xiang* came to be applied to the person who was responsible for assisting his lord in the most important affairs of his household.³³ The same is also true for titles of the nine Western Han ministers. During the Western Han era, the grand coachmen (*tai-pu*) took charge of the matters related to imperial horses, including horses for army and imperial carriages. However, the title originated during the Western Zhou Dynasty as the king’s “chauffeur.”³⁴ Also, during the Western Zhou period, *feng-chang* was the person who took charge of all the ritual activities and lineage relations. It acquired its new name *tai-chang*, or grand master of ceremonies, during the Warring States and Western Han periods. In fact, Ch’ien Mu has pointed out that at least seven of the nine ministries of the Western Han bureaucracy originated from the offices responsible for the royal or ducal families’ private affairs rather than for matters of the state. In Ch’ien’s words, “a household became a state.”³⁵ Bu, among many other scholars, has detailed the Western Zhou and SA&WS legacy in the Western Han bureaucratic system along the same line.³⁶

During the Western Zhou era, the bureaucratic system operated only in the royal domain. Most of the ducal states were too small to have the need to establish a bureaucratic form of government. During the Spring and Autumn era, when the Zhou king lost control over the dukedoms, some 150 dukedoms started to wage wars against each other. In the process, a few successful states greatly expanded their territories. To manage the new territories, these states sooner or later learned from the Western Zhou government structure, which spread the bureaucratic methods of governance around the seventh century BCE. This wave of bureaucratization, however, was rather rudimentary: the dukes in most states also granted the newly annexed territory to aristocrats who had played crucial roles in the conquest. Yet this kind of “feudal” arrangement induced rivalries among the aristocrats and between the dukes and aristocrats and led to a general “feudal crisis” in the sixth century BCE.³⁷ It was amid such a feudal crisis that the

33. Ch’ien 1982: 6.

34. Bu 2002: 54; Ch’ien 1982: 8.

35. Ch’ien 1982: 8.

36. Bu 2002: 3.

37. Hsu 1999; Zhao 2006.

state of Wei initiated a fully fledged bureaucratic reform during the fifth century BCE. Wei's reforms greatly strengthened state capacity and made it hard for the other states to resist its military might. Under Wei's military pressure, a new wave of bureaucratization started in the early fourth century BCE, or the early part of the Warring States era. What followed was that bureaucratization led to the increase of a state's military capacity, which in turn stimulated further processes of bureaucratization. This war-bureaucratization synergy facilitated the rise of total war and paved the road to the rise of the unified Qin Empire. In the whole process, the Western Zhou bureaucratic model of government was transmitted and greatly developed.³⁸ Now let us turn to the Western Han bureaucracy.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE WESTERN HAN BUREAUCRACY

The Western Han bureaucracy was directly modeled after the officialdom of the short-lived Qin Empire. The structure of the Western Han bureaucracy underwent many changes in the course of its history of over two hundred years. The empire faced different issues and challenges at different times. The relationships between the emperor and bureaucracy also changed under different reigns. The size and power of some government branches shrank while others expanded and new agencies were created. Since the Han bureaucracy experienced major changes under the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE), the following discussion relies much on my understanding of the Han government structure crystallized during that period. Interested readers should consult Hans Bielenstein for an excellent account of the Han bureaucracy structure and its changes over time.³⁹

The bureaucracy of the Western Han government boasted a size of 120,285 officials in 2 CE. Loewe speculates that this number may not include the lower-level officials at the grass roots.⁴⁰ In the unearthed Donghai Commandery documents dated to the late Western Han Dynasty, the total number of officials in that commandery is listed as 2,203, and most of these officials were grassroots personnel such as accessory clerk (492), chief of the officials' hostel (688), and *dou*-salary clerks (501).⁴¹ We know that the Western Han Empire comprised 1,587 county-level government units at the time and the Donghai Commandery contained 38 counties. Based on the data, the estimated total number of officials below the commandery level is $2,203 \times (1,587/38) = 92,004$.⁴² Including the officials of the state-level government, the officials of the provincial-level government, and officials

38. Zhao 2006.

39. Bielenstein 1980.

40. Loewe 1986c: 466.

41. Liao 2005: 62. *Dou* measures an amount of grain. One *dou* equals 1.996 liters. *Dou*-salary clerks formed a large category of the lowest-rank officials whose annual salaries were measured by *dou* instead of *dan* (ranks and payments are discussed in detail in section 3.1).

42. Liao 2005: 58–61.

at different censorial offices, the total number of 120,285 officials is a believable figure and the figure should include the grassroots officials.⁴³

At the pinnacle of the Western Han government structure was the emperor. As the head of the state, the emperor relied on the bureaucracy to run the country and at the same time he furnished the bureaucracy with legitimacy and authority. In comparison with Roman emperors, the Han emperors tended to be much more ritualistic and passive. While a Roman emperor was above all a military leader and was expected to rule the state actively, the Han emperor was expected to act as a ritual head and to reign in a passive manner.⁴⁴ This, of course, just summarizes a general pattern. In fact, founding emperors of new dynasties tended to be active rulers. Moreover, depending on the personality as well as some other factors, a few mid-dynasty emperors also rose to become active rulers. Emperor Wu was an example of one such ruler.

The emperor was connected with the government bodies via the Inner Court and Outer Court. The Inner Court had six masters: master of clothing, master of food, master of headgear, master of banquets, master of baths, and master of writing. The first five masters took charge of the daily personal life of the emperor. These positions were usually filled by the eunuchs. The master of writing was the emperor's secretary. The office could be occupied by either eunuchs or civilian officials. Among the six masters, the master of writing was particularly important. During the reign of Emperor Wu, the office of the master of writing gradually expanded, and it eventually replaced the office of the chancellor as the most powerful office during the late Western Han Dynasty. Besides the six masters, the Inner Court was also filled with a large number of officials with no specific administrative positions under the titles such as gentlemen (*lang*), talents (*boshi*), regular attendant (*changshi*), cavalier attendant (*sanqi*), middle grandee (*zhong dafu*), and so on.⁴⁵ Most of these Inner Court officials were administratively under the control of the two ministries of the Outer Court—the superintendent of the imperial clan and privy treasurer. In terms of the structures, the Inner Court and Outer Court were not completely divided.⁴⁶ They differed in that, while the officials of the Inner Court dealt with issues related to the private matters of the emperor or his family, the officials of the Outer Court administrated the whole country. Since the Inner Court officials were much closer to and more trusted by the emperor, they would naturally be utilized by an active emperor who wanted to push through

43. Note that the size of the bureaucracy was further expanded during the Eastern Han Dynasty. For instance, the total numbers of officials were 927 for Henan County and 796 for Luoyang County during the Eastern Han era: Liao 2005: 57. However, in the Western Han Donghai Commandery record, the county that had the maximum number of officials was Haixi (107) and that with the minimum number was Cheng (22): Liao 2005: 62. Even though Henan and Luoyang Counties were both very close to the Eastern Han capital and probably had more officials as a result, the huge differences must also have reflected a steady expansion of the bureaucracy during the Han period.

44. Finer 1997: 482; Zhao 2006.

45. Different kinds of gentlemen and talents again carried more specific titles with different ranks.

46. Yang 2001: 144–9.

his own policies. This character of the Inner Court would become very important when an active emperor like Emperor Wu came to power.

The Outer Court of the Western Han was headed by three excellencies (*san gong*): chancellor, supreme commandant, and imperial counselor, who took charge respectively of the government administration, military affairs, and the censorial branch of the bureaucracy. Unlike the Roman Empire, the Han Empire was dominated by civilian officials and generals had no legitimate position in routine domestic politics. In fact, under the Western Han bureaucracy, the chancellor also took charge of military matters, and most supreme commandants were civilians when they occupied the office. Although the whole structure checked and balanced the power within the government, the chancellor was no doubt at the center of the apparatus.

The importance of the chancellor made his office a gigantic enterprise.⁴⁷ He was assisted by the grandee secretary, who in turn had two assistants and one master of records under his leadership. The two assistants and the master of records were still very high ranking officials and had more lower-level assistants under their control.⁴⁸ The secretariat of the chancellor was composed of thirteen bureaux (*cao*).⁴⁹ The titles of these bureaus (with brief explanations of their main duties when necessary) were:⁵⁰

1. The West Bureau (appointment of all officials below the rank of 2,000 *shi*).
2. The East Bureau (promotion, demotion, and dismissal of all officials below the rank of 2,000 *shi*, including the military officers).
3. The Bureau of Imperial Household (taking charge of the revenues of the imperial household and supervising the imperial household's activities, including sacrifice to the imperial ancestors).
4. The Bureau of Memorials (responsible for all the memorials presented to the emperor).
5. The Bureau of Litigation (adjudication of criminal law).
6. The Bureau of Communication and Standards (responsible for all standards of weights, measures, and postal service).
7. The Bureau of Military Transportation (taking charge of troop transportation and managing various other forms of transportation and logistics).
8. The Bureau of Bandit Control.
9. The Bureau of Criminal Executions.
10. The Bureau of Soldiers (directing affairs related to military service).
11. The Bureau of Gold (issuing currency and operating monopolized state industries such as iron and salt production).

47. The chancellor's office included a staff of 382 members in 117 BCE: Bu 2002: 295.

48. The grandee secretary ranked 2,000 *shi*, and his two assistants ranked 1,000 *shi*: Bielenstein 1980: 8–9.

49. Note that a fourteenth bureau, the Bureau of Consultation, was also mentioned in some Han documents: Bielenstein 1980: 13.

50. The description of the thirteen bureaus is mainly adapted from Ch'ien 1982: 3–5.

12. The Bureau of Granaries (taking charge of levies, taxes, and the storage of state grain).
13. The Bureau of Yellow Cabinet (maintenance of all government records and supervision of the works of all other bureaus).

The names and responsibilities of these bureaus give us a sense of the reach of the power that the chancellor wielded as well as the daily function of the government. Beside the thirteen bureaus, the chancellor also led nine ministers (*jiu qing*), each of whom had multiple bureaus under his control: grand minister of ceremonies, superintendent of the imperial court, commandant of the guard, grand coachman, commandant of justice, grand herald, superintendent of the imperial clan, grand minister of agriculture, and privy treasurer. The functions of these nine ministers somewhat overlapped with the thirteen bureaus under the direct control of the chancellor. In fact, overlapping jurisdiction was a character of the entire Western Han bureaucracy, which, I believe, also functioned as a check and balance as well as a performance-checking mechanism.

In the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty, the chancellor was the supreme commander of the entire bureaucracy. As part of the efforts to curtail the power of the chancellorship, the positions of the supreme commandant and the imperial counselor became increasingly important in the course of the Western Han Dynasty. By the end of the dynasty, the chancellor, the supreme commandant, and the imperial counselor had become known as three excellencies to stress their equal status.⁵¹ While the supreme commandant was supposed to take charge of military affairs, many bureaus under his control took charge of civilian affairs and supervision of the entire officialdom. During the late Western Han Dynasty, the position of supreme commandant was often occupied by the head of the Inner Court, the emperor's confidant. It rose to become the most powerful position in the bureaucracy even though the rank of the position remained unchanged.

Under the central government were different levels of local government. In the late Western Han era, the country was divided into 13 provinces, with 103 commanderies that in turn were divided into 1,500-plus county-level government units. Both the heads of provinces and commanderies were 2,000-*shi* ranked officials.⁵² In other words, they were ranked the same as the ministers of the central government. To inspect the performance of the local government, the central government sent one inspector to each province. During the Han Dynasty, the title and rank of this office changed several times, but most of the time it was set with a relatively lower 600-*shi* rank. The rank of the inspectors is a tricky issue. Inspectors should not have the power to interfere with the work of

51. Bu 2002: chapter 4; Li 2002: chapter 4.

52. One *shi* during the Han Dynasty was equal to 29.5 kilograms. It is also a measurement of an amount of grain. The Han government ranked payment to officials in *shi*.

the local government. Yet even though the central government had set specific guidelines on the duties of the inspectors, the fact that the inspectors had the authority to check and evaluate the performances of local officials and report back to the central government gave them enormous power over the local officials. To minimize their power to intimidate, the central government sent a low-rank 600-*shi* inspector to check the work of a 2,000-*shi* high-rank official. In fact, during the Western Han Dynasty, except for the imperial counselor, who had a 2,000-*shi* rank, all other officials in the censorial system had low ranks.⁵³

The Han bureaucracy was like a multiply-layered Chinese box, with each layer bearing close structural resemblance to the others. During the Western Han era, for example, every commandery was headed by a grand governor (*tai shou*), who took charge of all the civilian and military affairs in his commandery including the administration of the criminal law. The grand governor was assisted by several lower-ranked officers with titles such as assistant, master of records, privy treasurer, and chief clerk. Under the leadership of the grand governor's office were many bureaus, including but not limited to the Bureau of All Purposes, Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Banditry, Bureau of Decisions, Bureau of Consultation, and Bureau of Agriculture Promotion. The grand governor was also assisted by an equivalent rank (2,000-*shi*) official entitled chief commandant (*dou wei*) who was in charge of all the military-related matters including training the local troops and militia, suppressing bandits, and inspecting fortifications and beacons. Again, this office was staffed by associates and assistants, heads of various bureaus, and military officers with titles such as majors, captains, and millarians.⁵⁴

The county-level government of the Western Han again had a similar structure. I, therefore, omit the discussion. What I want to note here is that the Han bureaucracy was vastly complex even at the lower levels. Bielenstein's book has provided a glossary with over nine hundred Han Dynasty official titles.⁵⁵ Yet even such a comprehensive glossary contains only seven of twenty-one official titles of the officials and clerks in the county government.⁵⁶ This gives us a good picture of the complexity of the Han bureaucracy.

3. RANKING, RECRUITMENT, PROMOTION, AND PERFORMANCE CHECKING

To maintain an effective bureaucracy, the Western Han Empire developed a ranking, recruitment, promotion, and performance-checking system.

53. For discussion of the characteristics of this political design and its ramifications during Chinese history, see Ge 1992: 170–7.

54. Bielenstein 1980: 94.

55. Bielenstein 1980.

56. Liao 2005: 53.

3.1. *Ranking*

The officials in the Western Han bureaucracy were ranked in eighteen grades in terms of the amount of the annual compensation due to an office. The compensation was measured by *shi*, with one *shi*, as noted earlier, equaling 29.5 kilograms of grain. In reality, however, an official received a combination of grain and cash as his payment. The highest rank was 10,000 *shi*, which was reserved for the chancellor. The next were 2,000 *shi* and “equivalent to 2,000 *shi*.” Numerous officials, including the chancellor’s associates, the nine ministers, and heads of the provincial and commandery government, had a rank of 2,000 *shi*.⁵⁷ The ranks then went down to 1,000 *shi* and “equivalent to 1,000 *shi*” and 600 *shi* and “equivalent to 600 *shi*,”⁵⁸ and from there to grades of *shi* and equivalents of *shi* of 400, 300, 200, and 100; finally, two grassroots ranks were called *dou*-salary clerks. Except for those receiving regular salaries, the emperor also bestowed substantial gifts to metropolitan officials in the form of cash, silk, food, and wine. In Bielenstein’s assessment, except for the two lowest rank *dou*-salary clerks, the rest of the officials should have been able to live comfortably on their salaries.⁵⁹

3.2. *Recruitment and Promotion*

Once a bureaucracy was established, how to recruit qualified officers to fill the ranks became crucial. The recruitment system established during the Western Han Dynasty was crude, but it was the forerunner of the much more refined civil examination system that emerged during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). In the beginning of the Western Han era, most government officials were veterans who had made contributions to the establishment of the dynasty. Even then, however, Emperor Gaozu (r. 206–195 BCE) still published an edict calling for talented individuals to serve the government.⁶⁰ By the time Emperor Wu came to power, however, almost all the veterans and even their immediate descendants had died out. New methods of selecting and promoting officials, therefore, became a must.

A number of scholars have extensively discussed the Western Han mechanisms for official recruitment and promotion.⁶¹ What I present in the following is a very brief summary to capture some of their most important features.

During the Western Han Dynasty, the most common method of recruiting government officials was the recommendation system. In an edict of 134 BCE,

57. These were the general rules. In reality, although the governor of the commandery government ranked at the 2,000-*shi* level, he might actually receive 1,000 or even 800 *shi* as his compensation. For examples, see *Hanshu* (The history of the Western Han), “Biography of Emperor Xuan.” Throughout, I use the Zhonghua Shuju edition of the *Hanshu*, Beijing 1962.

58. Most county magistrates received compensations between 600 and 1,000 *shi*.

59. Bielenstein 1980: 127–8.

60. The decree was published in 196 BCE. One of the sentences in the decree reads: “For all the worthy gentlemen who are willing to follow me, they will all be honored and promoted.” See *Hanshu*, “Biography of Emperor Gaozu.”

61. Notably An and Xiong 1984; Bu 2002; Bielenstein 1980: chapter 6; Huang 1985; Yang 2005.

Emperor Wu required each commandery or feudal kingdom to recommend someone “filially pious and incorrupt” (*xiao lian*) to the central government each year. This method was routinized and became the most important channel of recruiting government officials. Those who were recommended to the central government in this way were subjected to further examinations to check their qualifications. Local officials who failed to make recommendations or recommended unqualified people were punishable by dismissal.⁶² Those who passed the scrutiny would normally receive the title of gentlemen and would act as imperial bodyguards for a number of years. The emperor could then scrutinize and cultivate personal relationships with the imperial bodyguards. Those who gained the emperor’s trust would then be promoted to regular official positions.⁶³

In addition to the regular recruitment, the state recruited government officials through special edicts. In 140 BCE, Emperor Wu called on high-level officials or imperial relatives—including the chancellor, imperial counselor, dukes of princely kingdoms, fully ranked 2,000-*shi* officials, and the chancellors of the princely kingdoms—to recommend individuals who were “capable and good” (*xian liang*), “sincere and upright” (*fang zheng*), and “frank and being able to admonish unflinchingly” (*zhi yan ji jian*) to the central government.⁶⁴ In 107 CE, Emperor An of the Eastern Han Dynasty (r. 106–25 CE) issued an edict that proclaimed, “I summon the excellencies and ministers, the officials of the Inner and Outer Courts, the governors of commanderies, and chancellors of the princely kingdoms to recommend one person in each of the following categories: those who are capable and good and sincere and upright, those with special powers and skills, those with political and administrative talents, those who understand the past and present, and those who are able to speak out frankly and admonish unflinchingly.”⁶⁵ Most of the recommended would travel to the capital to be interviewed by the emperor or his associates. Those who were qualified were recruited into the official rank. It must be noted that not all of this kind of recruitment activity was initiated by the emperor. Some high-level government branches also tried to recruit lower-level government officials in similar manner (*bi zhao*).⁶⁶

The Western Han government also opened a school system, the Academy (*tai xue*), to train students for civil service recruitment. The students of the Academy had to be at least eighteen years old and were annually selected. The Academy trained students in five Confucian classics. After a year of study, the students

62. Bielenstein 1980: 135.

63. Later on, each province was required to recommend an “abundant talent” each year. Unlike the filially pious and incorrupt, abundant talents did not need to undergo a probationary period, and in many cases were directly appointed as county magistrates once they were recommended. See Bielenstein 1980: 136–7 and Zheng 1992b: 197–8.

64. *Hanshu*, “Biography of Emperor Wu.”

65. *Hou Hanshu* (The history of the Eastern Han), “Biography of Emperor An,” Zhonghua Shuju edition, Beijing 1965.

66. Zheng 1992b: 195.

were recruited by government bureaus of different levels according to their performance. This school system started during the reign of Emperor Wu and expanded steadily. By the middle of the second century CE, the annual enrollment at the Academy had exceeded thirty thousand.⁶⁷

Besides the above more regular and large-scale methods of official recruitment, the Han state also recruited officials by a number of other methods. Some special task officers such as the salt and iron production control officials were often recruited from the former salt and iron merchants (even though merchants were not allowed to participate in the routine official recruitment). Some people became government officials by self-recommendation. Some soldiers were appointed as imperial bodyguards (gentlemen) because of their good performance in battles. Officials with the rank of 2,000 *shi* or above were allowed to send their sons to act as imperial bodyguards. Some of these bodyguards rose to prominence in their official careers. Finally, when the state was short of money, it would also make noble titles and official ranks available for sale.⁶⁸

Closely related to the issue of civil service recruitment is official promotion. The criteria of official promotion during the Western Han Dynasty were by and large those of meritocracy, at least on paper, even though personal relations with superiors always played a crucial role in the promotion process.⁶⁹ What made the case a little more complicated was the fact that the Han Dynasty bureaucrats were placed under two tracks: the clerks (*li*) and the government officials (*guan*).⁷⁰ The clerks were usually selected and promoted by the heads of different levels of government, while the powers of appointment and promotion of the government officials were in the hands of the emperor. During the Han Dynasty, the lowest-level officials were ranked at 200 *shi*, but clerks were mostly ranked at or below the 200 *shi* level, even though a few clerks could reach a 400 *shi* rank.⁷¹ If a clerk behaved well in his post, he would have the chance to be recommended for and promoted to the official rank through the recommendation system as discussed earlier.⁷²

In his recent work, Liao has provided systematic data that give a sense of the recruitment and promotion of local government officials during the Western Han period.⁷³ Liao's study is based on the late Western Han official documents unearthed in the Western Han's Donghai Commandery region. His book

67. Bielenstein 1980: 139.

68. Chang 2007a: 131.

69. For example, it is recorded in *Hanshu*, "Biography of Du Ye," that: "When Wang Shang was a commander-in-chief and Wei general, Du Ye was his master of records. Du became a confidante of Wang and was later appointed to the attending secretary position because of Wang's recommendation."

70. Any bureaucrat working below the county-level government was regarded as a clerk. For the bureaucrats who worked at the county-or-above levels of the government, officials were those who were in charge of (1) a county, a commandery, or a ministry, (2) major branches of the county government, or (3) the major branches or bureaus of the commandery or central government, while the clerks were their subordinates.

71. Bu 1996: 42.

72. Bu 1996.

73. Liao 2005.

documents the promotion records of ninety-five individuals, with information on their previous official positions, new positions, and reasons for the promotion. His results show that sixty of them (63 percent) were promoted because of their good performance, twenty-one of them (22 percent) because they were recommended as abundant talents (three), filially pious and incorrupt (or incorrupt) (sixteen), and sincere and upright (two). Eleven of them (11.6 percent) were promoted because of their good performance in maintaining good local public order (by either solving criminal cases or suppressing minor unrest), and three of them (3.2 percent) were promoted by the emperor's special permission. If we include the eleven individuals who had maintained good local public order also under the "good on-job performance" category, the number of people in this category increases to seventy-one (75 percent). In other words, even though most people recorded in the unearthed documents were lower-rank officials or clerks working at the county-level government, it shows very clearly that, although officials and clerks were recruited from various channels, once they were recruited, on-job performance was most crucial for an individual's career advancement in the Western Han bureaucracy.

3.3 Performance Checking

A bureaucracy once established is likely to be manipulated to become a self-serving enterprise with functions and goals that are different from those of the central state.⁷⁴ To prevent this problem, the state has to set up some performance-checking mechanisms and institutions. During the Western Han period, the central government strictly avoided appointing an official to a post in his hometown or in a place where a major branch of his clan lived.⁷⁵ More specifically, a county magistrate should not have been born in the county under his jurisdiction, and a commandery governor's birth place should be outside the commandery under his rule.⁷⁶ Moreover, the state also appointed numerous officials in the central government with titles such as "serving within the palace" (*ji shi zhong*), "grandee remonstrant" (*jian dafu*), and "gentlemen consultant" (*yi lang*). One of the most important duties of these officials was to discuss, criticize, and object to the decisions made by the chancellor and other top-level officials, as well as the decisions made by the emperor himself. Once the wrongdoing of some of the high-rank officials or the emperor became known to these officials, some of them also could step forward to make criticisms. Some of these officials honored their own tasks to such an extent that they were even willing to face serious punishment and death to lodge relentless opposition to a decision or conduct of the chancellor or the emperor.

74. Eisenstadt 1963: 279–80.

75. Ch'ien 1982: 32.

76. Yan 1961: 357. Nevertheless, the majority of clerks who worked for the local government were natives. The unearthed hometown records for all the Donghai Commandery officials confirm this: Liao 2005: 82.

To make the work of the local officials and clerks accountable, different levels of the local government were required to document a large variety of their activities.⁷⁷ Such documentation was not only very detailed at the levels of the central, provincial, and commandery governments, but also at the county and grassroots levels of administrations. This has been confirmed by more and more unearthed documents recording the activities of local Western Han administrations. For instance, Juyan was a very remote garrison of the Western Han Empire located in the west part of present-day Gansu Province. However, even in such a remote area, as Loewe's English translation of the unearthed Juyan documents has shown amply,⁷⁸ the local administrations had tried to record various details of their activities, ranging from the control of travelers into and out of the region (109–14), illegal border-crossing activities (102), health conditions of some local officers and the kind of treatments they received (123), payment paid or yet to be paid to some officers (285), and many other matters.⁷⁹

The central state also tried to make the officials' activities as rule binding as possible. At the center, different government branches processed different kinds of local documents and made decisions or recommendations on them. Officials in other designated government branches then reviewed the decisions or recommendations. While the emperor seldom initiated a policy and important documents mostly went to the chancellor's office for review and approval, the most important documents and decisions had to be sent to the emperor for his final approval. This would make a diligent emperor quite busy. As for the local governments, one of their main duties was to make sure that all the policies and orders from the center were quickly transmitted and followed. For this, they needed to keep the local road system and postal system well maintained.⁸⁰ The local governments generated their own decrees and orders to be followed by the relevant officers and local residents, but they also needed to follow strict rules in performing their duties and recording their major activities. This could be as detailed as the sick leave application of an officer and the written approval of the application from the higher-level government, or a minor criminal incident and higher review of the local government's way of dealing with the incident.⁸¹

The central government also audited the local government and the branches of the central government offices on an annual basis. At the county level, the county magistrate started to receive the written reports in the fall. The reports

77. Unless noted otherwise, the account in this section is derived from the following sources: Bu 2002: chapter 7; Ge 1992; Lou and Liu 1992: chapter 5.

78. Loewe 1967.

79. See Chang 2007b: 130–72 for an excellent analysis of frontier control during the Han Dynasty based on the unearthed Juyan documents.

80. The ability of the local government to maintain good road and postal systems was regarded by the central government as an important sign of good governance.

81. Bu 2002: 275–80.

covered the work of the grassroots-level government and the information that the central government was particularly interested in, such as the size of local populations and arable land, the local government spending and taxation, and local crimes and rebellions. The county magistrate and his assistants tried to evaluate the performance of the local governments and decide on awards or punishments to the local officials based on the reports. They then prepared books combining the grassroots-level information with the county-level records, and sent them to the commandery government for further auditing. The whole process went up the chain until all the books had reached the chancellor's office. The books would then be audited by the officials at the chancellor's office with the assistance of the members of the imperial counselor's office. Each branch of the central government and its local outlets conducted their annual auditing in a similar manner, and their final auditing books also ended up in the chancellor's office. The performance of the top-level officials who were outside the auditing system would be directly checked by the emperor with the assistance of some branches of the bureaucracy.⁸²

One of the purposes of annual auditing was for the promotion and demotion of officials. Officials receiving poor ranking would be punished and the top-ranking officials rewarded. The ranking would also be used as a major criterion for the promotion of officials, which I discussed earlier. The auditing system was designed to promote meritocracy and inspire local officials to work harder. While the auditing was done annually, the local government had to make daily decisions. It is, therefore, hard to check the actual performance of the local officials just based on the annual auditing system. For instance, the *Shiji* (The Records of the Grand Historian), Pingzhunshu, records that when Emperor Wu inspected several commanderies in 113 BCE, he was badly hosted in the Hedong Commandery because the local governor did not expect his coming. His entourage was also unable to get food in the Longxi Commandery because of its sudden arrival. Finally, on his way back to the capital via the Xin Qinzong region, he found with surprise that no military posts and postal offices were in place. The record mentions that two of the commandery governors and many officials either committed suicide or were condemned to death by Emperor Wu as a result. This kind of experience might have prompted Emperor Wu to send out thirteen inspectors (*ci shi*) to check the performance of the local administrations in 106 BCE.⁸³

82. The branches of bureaucracy in charge of this duty changed over time. For example, in 118 BCE, Emperor Wu established a director of justice office under the chancellor that was responsible for assisting the chancellor in reporting matters which were against the law. This office was later overshadowed by the Office of the Colonel Director of Retainers, which had similar functions. See de Crespigny 1981: 52–3.

83. De Crespigny 1981: 44–52. Later during the Western Han period, the inspector acquired the title of “shepherd” with more expansive powers. Also, according to Wang 2006: 15, the thirteen inspectors covered thirteen inspection regions that did not exactly match the jurisdiction of Western Han provinces. They were circuit inspectors who did not originally have permanent local offices.

The Western Han censorial system established during the reign of Emperor Wu had its precursors during the Qin and the early Western Han Dynasties. In comparison with the earlier censorial devices, however, the new system had the following new characteristics. First, before the reign of Emperor Wu, the office with censorial duties also took charge of many other government businesses. During the Qin Dynasty, for example, a commandery was run by three officers—the governor, the commandant, and the inspector. Yet the inspector not only functioned as a censor but had other duties as well, including but not limited to duties such as running public projects, recommending local officials, and arresting criminals and managing the jails.⁸⁴ The inspectors under Emperor Wu, however, were professionals whose only duty was to check the performance of the local officials. Second, the tasks of the inspectors under Emperor Wu were much better defined.⁸⁵ They checked the performance only of the high-ranking 2,000-*shi* officials, and they were only allowed to send memorials to the central government reporting the situations and making recommendations; they could not make any arrests except under very special circumstances. Third, the inspectors were ranked at 600 *shi*, but had the power to check the performance of the 2,000-*shi* officials. Fourth, the good performance of the inspectors was highly rewarded. Most 600-*shi* officials in the Western Han government were never able to reach 2,000-*shi* rank in their career. However, a 600-*shi* inspector would normally be appointed to a 2,000-*shi* rank position after his nine-year tenure. If an inspector did his job particularly well, he could be promoted to a 2,000-*shi* position much faster.⁸⁶

These characteristics of the inspector system were carefully designed. The lower rank and limited jurisdiction was intended to avoid overexpansion of the inspectors' power to the point of interfering with local governance. Their simple function greatly improved the quality of the inspection. Since they were not involved in local affairs, it was also less likely that they were going to be tangled with local interests and corruption networks. Finally, the special power they had gave them great authority in performing their duties well, and they had great motivation to perform well because inspectors were on a faster track of career advancement. The nature of the Western Han censorial system was thus characterized by later Chinese politicians and scholars as low ranking, high authority,

84. The *Shiji*, "The Biography of the First Emperor of Qin," records that "[t]he state of Qin divided its territory into thirty-six commanderies, each headed by a governor, a commandant and an inspector." Even during the Western Han Dynasty, the officials in the imperial counselor office also took charge of a large number of functions beyond their censorial duties. Throughout, I use the Zhonghua Shuju edition of the *Shiji*, Beijing, 1959.

85. The Western Han central government set six guidelines defining the duties of the inspectors. They included such items as censoring the illegal acquisition of local land and residents, the illegal accumulation of personal wealth, the excessive use of violence in judging cases and careless handling of difficult cases, bullying the local people, receiving bribes, and unfair treatment of subordinates. See Lou and Liu 1992: 300; see de Crespigny 1981: 48–9 for detail.

86. For example, *Hanshu*, "Biography of Wang Ba," records that Wang Ba was promoted to the Yingzhou governor's post only three years after acting as the inspector of Yangzhou.

and handsome awards. It was greatly admired by Chinese politicians and historians and emulated in the later dynasties.⁸⁷

4. THE MAKING OF A PREVAILING IDEOLOGY

Comparing the Western Han and Roman bureaucracies, I would argue that the most crucial difference between them is not their different sizes or even their different levels of complexity, but rather that the Western Han bureaucracy had adopted Confucianism as the moral base of the officials as well as the basis of cooperation between the ruling house and the bureaucracy.⁸⁸ It was the installation of Confucianism as an ethos of bureaucracy that set the imperial China bureaucracy apart from the Roman bureaucracy and patterned the dynamics of Chinese history.

In the early Western Han government, Hung-Lao thought⁸⁹ prevailed among Chinese rulers and politicians,⁹⁰ and the emperors ruled by simple law, light taxation, and low interference with society. These policies brought an age of prosperity during the reigns of Emperor Wen (r. 180–157 BCE) and Emperor Jing (r. 157–141 BCE). With prosperity emerged new issues. First, this peace and prosperity stimulated a huge growth in population and the emergence of large businessmen and landowners. Their increasing ability to manipulate the market in conjunction with the rise in population drove many peasants to leave their land. The Huang-Lao ruling methods that had worked well so far no longer suited the new situation. Second, most officials in the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty were veterans who had fought with Emperor Gaozu in establishing the dynasty. By the reign of Emperor Jing, most of these people and their descendants had passed away, and the state needed new criteria for recruiting people into the official rank. Third, while the Huang-Lao ruling methods had brought success, they could not provide a foundation to justify state rule and a moral base for cooperation between the ruling house and elites. The issue of the basis of state legitimation, which had always been in the minds of the early

87. See Wang 2006: 21 for a discussion of praise given to the Western Han censorial system by later Chinese politicians and scholars. See also Hucker 1966: 10–29 for his discussion of the impact of the Qin and Han censorial practices on the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE) censorial system.

88. Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism are very biased concepts when they are used to describe the classic learning of Eastern Zhou origin, and the precise meanings and historical changes of these terms will be discussed in Zhao forthcoming b, chapters 7, 10, 13).

89. The Huang-Lao philosophy popular during the early Western Han period upheld some key ideas expressed in Laozi's *Dao and Its Power*, but at the same time also incorporated elements of other ancient China philosophies including Legalism and Confucianism. This highly eclectic philosophy was so influential that we see its imprint on most early Western Han thinkers. For example, we can find plenty of Huang-Lao elements in the thought of famous figures such as Jia Yi (200–168 BCE), Lu Jia (ca. 240–170 BCE), and Sima Qian, but their works also contained a Confucian moral core as well as elements that were later associated with other schools of thought. See Han (2005: 121–45) for an excellent discussion of Huang-Lao philosophy during the early Western Han era.

90. Zhou 1999: 71–6.

Western Han political elite, came to the forefront after the dynasty passed its initial stage.⁹¹

The existence of these issues and problems, as well as the ways in which the Han ruling house had tried to deal with them, led to the eventual rise of imperial Confucianism as a state ideology as well as the selection of officials based on their mastery of the classics (particularly the Confucian classics) as a way to recruit officials that would sustain a state–social elites alliance.⁹² It is impossible to summarize Confucianism (as it was codified during the Han Dynasty) in a few sentences. Suffice it to say that Confucianism sees the relationships between the state and society as an extension of familial relations. It legitimizes state power by equating the head of the state with the head of the family and justifies the domination of the state over society. At the same time, it is also an ideology acceptable to the elite population for three reasons: (1) Confucianism emphasizes not only the domination of the head of state over his officials and subjects but also the domination of male over female, old over young, and officials over their subjects. (2) While emphasizing the domination of state power, Confucianism also stresses the importance of a ruler's good conduct, and empowers Confucian scholar-officials to educate rulers with Confucian doctrines from childhood onward and to criticize rulers. (3) Once Confucianism was transformed into a state ideology, it also Confucianized the bureaucracy in the sense that Confucian learning and moral conduct became increasingly important in the selection of officials. Some scholars have compared the Confucianized bureaucracy to the church in Christendom. This is an overstatement. Even so, the Confucianized bureaucracy did become an important institution for the state to absorb social elites into the government, an organizational base for the perpetuation and domination of Confucianism in society, and an institution that checked the emperor's power.

Confucianism's heavy emphasis on moral rule made it impractical and unable to compete with the more practical Legalist philosophy during the Warring States era when life-and-death military conflicts required ultrainstrumental measures. The influence of Confucianism in politics, therefore, had always been

91. How a more stable empire could be established, or what the basis of state legitimacy should be, had been central concerns of the Han ruling elite ever since Emperor Gaozu came to power. For instance, *Shiji*, "Biography of Li Sheng and Lu Jia" (3506–7) records that Lu Jia frequently cited *The Book of Poetry* and other classics in his conversation with Liu Bang and Liu Bang got very mad and replied: "I conquered the world on horseback and those classics to me are useless." To this, Lu Jia replied: "You can conquer the world on horseback, but how can you rule it on horseback? King Tang of Shang and King Wu of Zhou had [both] conquered the world by force but consolidated their rule by benevolence and moral guidance. A stable rule always combines military might with moral guidance.... If the Qin Empire after its conquest of the world, instead of ruling it by harsh legal codes, had learned from the early sage kings and ruled the world by benevolence and moral guidance, how could your majesty today have this reign?" The *Shiji* records that Liu Bang was very embarrassed after hearing Lu's reply and immediately asked Lu to write essays to further elaborate his view. Lu Jia wrote a total of twelve essays collectively titled *New Discourses* presented to Liu Bang as memorials.

92. The Confucianism emerging during the Han Dynasty is also called imperial Confucianism. It is an eclectic synthesis of ancient China cosmology, Legalist doctrines, and Huang-Lao worldviews with the teaching of Confucius at the core. See Zhao forthcoming b: chapter 10 for more detail on imperial Confucianism.

marginal before the Western Han. Yet as major military conflict had become a thing of the past and the regime's stability increasingly depended on the ruling house's cooperation with the bureaucratic elites and on elite cooperation with ordinary people, Confucianism immediately became an attractive ideology that both the state and elites could accept.

This historical transition began during the reign of Emperor Wu. As soon as Emperor Wu came to the throne, he promoted two Confucian scholars to the chancellor and supreme commandant positions.⁹³ From the second year of his reign (139 BCE), Emperor Wu had published several edicts requiring each commandery or feudal domain to recommend two individuals to him each year, one based on his scholarship and another on his filial conduct. Gradually, the recommendation system became a major official selection mechanism for the state. After 135 BCE, almost all the people recommended were local Confucian scholars who were known for being a filial son or being good at Confucian learning.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, to further promote Confucianism, Emperor Wu created a public education system to teach Confucian classics and to select talented individuals from among its students.⁹⁵

The introduction of Confucianism as a state ideology and as a major criterion in official recruitment was the most significant innovation of the Western Han Dynasty, which had long-lasting impact on the patterns of Chinese history. With the exaltation of Confucianism, the Western Han bureaucracy had now a "bureaucratic ideology" that modern scholars regard as essential for the good functioning of a government. It strengthened goal consensus among the officials, facilitated the recruitment of like-minded people, promoted public support, and maintained a high ethical standard.⁹⁶ Moreover, the Confucian rituals practiced in the Chinese family and state also served to indoctrinate a quasi-religious emotion, which tended to be more effective than a purely secular ideology.

Any kind of bureaucracy faces some intrinsic weaknesses, which include the erosion of morality among the officials, solidarity deficiency (the behavior of bureaucrats becoming devoid of emotional attachment to others), goal displacement (the replacement of the government's professed goals by other priorities that

93. Emperor Wu's initial efforts, however, were hampered by Empress Dowager Dou, who was devoted to Daoist teachings. Under her intervention, Emperor Wu was compelled to dismiss the two Confucian scholars he had just appointed. It was not until after her death in 135 BCE that Emperor Wu gained full power in the implementation of his new policy. See Bai, Gao and An 1995: 314.

94. Note that once a person was recruited into the official rank, his promotion would then be mainly based on his job performance, as discussed in the last section. Also, not all the officials recruited into the official ranks had been recommended and, therefore, not all recruitment was based on the officials' ability to master Confucianism.

95. While promoting Confucianism, Emperor Wu did not really suppress all the schools of thought as suggested by Dong Zhongshu. In fact, various schools of thought existed during and after the reign of Emperor Wu. Most senior officials whom Emperor Wu appointed had a highly eclectic orientation that combined Confucianism, Legalism, Daoism, and other Chinese philosophies. Emperor Wu himself was also deeply involved in various kinds of Daoist religious practices aimed at the pursuit of immortality: Lin 2003: 308–10; Yang 2001: 58–63, 308–15.

96. Downs 1967: 237–9. Contrast Eich in this volume, chapter 4.

often undermine those goals).⁹⁷ The introduction of Confucianism as a “bureaucratic ideology” slowed down the development of these problems within the bureaucracy.

The introduction of Confucianism as a “bureaucratic ideology” also facilitated the rise of a symbiotic relationship between the emperor and the bureaucracy. In this symbiotic relationship, while the emperor was legitimized as the son of heaven, his deserving of the heavenly mandate was subject to the judgment of meritocratically selected Confucian bureaucrats and the emperor could only exercise his power with the indispensable assistance of Confucian scholars who controlled the sophisticated bureaucracy. This political system provided a base of state legitimacy, moral guidance to all, a certain degree of checks and balances between the ruling house and bureaucrats, a large elite population with a homogeneous culture (after the seventh century CE the elite population was sustained by the regular civil examination system), and a certain level of upward mobility for the lower classes to join official ranks. The elevation of Confucianism as a state and bureaucratic ideology was such an appealing innovation that it inspired all later Chinese dynasties to emulate it, which gave China an exceptional degree of political continuity in comparison with all other world civilizations.

It is tempting to compare the Han Empire with the Western Roman Empire. Personally, I think that the Roman Empire had far “surpassed” the Han Empire in most respects. The Roman Empire did not endure Chinese-style massive popular uprisings and the degeneration of late dynastic rulers, and therefore, it lasted much longer than the Western Han or any single Chinese dynasty. The Roman army was able to maintain over three hundred thousand troops for several hundred years with good training and payment,⁹⁸ but the status of the soldiers and quality of the army forces in China significantly declined after the end of universal military service in the Eastern Han period.⁹⁹ Finally, according to one estimate,¹⁰⁰ the Roman economy was more monetized than its Chinese counterpart.¹⁰¹ Yet despite the many “strengths” of the Roman Empire, Roman civilization collapsed but Chinese civilization endured. Their different fates were owing largely to the different relationships between ideology and politics in Rome and China. In the Roman Empire, although the elite shared a similar secular culture,

97. Woodside 2006.

98. Watson 1969. This figure does not include the troops stationed near Rome and the navy.

99. Lewis 2000a. In fact, Han military strength declined significantly even during the reign of Emperor Wu. In the final years of Emperor Wu's reign, the Han army met with repeated setbacks in its wars against the Xiongnu (Chen, Li, and Liu 1998: 234–46). From then on, the Western Han government was only able to maintain a standoff with the Xiongnu. The decline of the Xiongnu in the later part of the Western Han period was caused more by natural disasters and internal strife than by the sheer strength or numbers of the Han army.

100. Scheidel 2009d: 202.

101. It has been estimated that the volume of Roman silver coinage in circulation was about 1.716 billion denarii during the mid-second century CE. This was in addition to three billion denarii worth of gold coins and a large number of bronze coins that circulated at the time (Hopkins 2009: 198–202). By contrast, the Han Dynasty coinage was dominated by less valuable bronze coins. The Han Dynasty monetary system was also much less stable and plagued by frequent policy changes and runaway inflation (Hou 2005: 233–40). See also Crawford 1974 and Duncan-Jones 1994 for the scale of Rome's monetary economy.

they remained pluralistic in religious belief, especially after the rise of Christianity. In China, Confucianism gradually became the dominant political ideology and the normative base of cooperation between emperors and the social elites. Although Chinese dynasties frequently collapsed for different reasons, once a new ruler had unified China he would invariably regard Confucianism as the best ruling ideology and the best basis of cooperation between state and society, and therefore establishing a new dynasty that more or less followed a political arrangement that had crystallized in the Han Dynasty. Chinese civilization (rather than any single Chinese dynasty), therefore, acquired an exceptional durability lacking to the civilization of the Roman Empire.

5. PROBLEMS OF THE WESTERN HAN BUREAUCRACY

The Western Han bureaucracy had “advantages” even compared with modern bureaucracies. On the other hand, it also had several drawbacks (some of which were intrinsic to imperial China’s political system). I start with the most salient one—the relationship between the emperor and the bureaucracy. I must immediately add that the impact of the emperor and the royal house on the functioning of the bureaucracy can quite reasonably be labeled by Weber’s notion of patrimonialism defined earlier, but if we just remain at this level of understanding we will be unable to see the complicated relationships between the emperor and bureaucracy and the ensuing political dynamics discussed below.

5.1. *The Emperor and the Bureaucracy*

Etienne Balazs, an eminent scholar who had a quite negative view of the Chinese political system, summarized the nature of the relationships between the emperor and the bureaucracy this way:

The first thing that strikes one about [the Chinese bureaucracy] is the precarious position of its members individually, contrasted with their continuous existence as a social class. Even the highest officials were, as individuals, at the mercy of the absolute and despotic state, and were liable to disappear suddenly from view. Any one of them might be minister one day, and consigned to a dungeon the next; yet within the same state that had condemned him as an individual, the body of officials as a whole continued, undisturbed, to play its part.¹⁰²

Balazs’s caricature of the premodern Chinese bureaucracy oversimplifies and distorts. The relationship between the emperor and the bureaucracy during the Western Han Dynasty and the entire history of imperial China varied greatly. It is, therefore, hard to summarize it into any single pattern. On the other hand,

102. Balazs 1964: 6.

I must stress that Balazs's comment is also echoed among many Chinese scholars,¹⁰³ and that the comment has captured the difficult relationship between the Chinese emperor and the bureaucracy and the worst case scenario when the tension became intolerable.

In imperial China, the emperor was the symbol of unity and ultimate source of bureaucratic authority. The bureaucracy could never function well without the legitimacy conveyed from the emperor. On the other hand, the emperor was not expected to take an active leadership role, and the real political and administrative power of the government resided in the bureaucracy, represented by the chancellor.¹⁰⁴ When this political arrangement worked well, it looked very much like the modern constitutional monarchy.¹⁰⁵ This was pretty much the situation during the Western Han Dynasty before the reign of Emperor Wu. To illustrate this point, let me quote a famous dialogue between Emperor Wen and his chancellor Chen Ping recorded in *Hanshu*, "Biography of Chen Ping." It started when Emperor Wen consulted his right chancellor Zhou Bo on some legal and financial matters of the state. Zhou was unable to answer the questions and felt greatly embarrassed. The emperor then asked his left chancellor Chen Ping the same question. Chen replied: "Different officials take responsibility for different jobs." The emperor demanded clarification: "What do you mean by that?" Chen then added: "If you want to know legal matters, you should ask the commandant of justice. If you want to inquire about matters related to money and grain, the best person to ask is the clerk of the capital for grain." The emperor then questioned: "If each matter is the responsibility of a particular person, what is left for an emperor to do?" Chen explained: "Your majesty's task is to lead me. Your majesty appointed me as a chancellor, and I am helping your majesty to lead the country. In heaven, I harmonize *ying* and *yang* and the order of the four seasons. On earth, I make sure everything develops as it should. Outside, I harness all the barbarians and feudal lords. Inside, I love and try to be close to the people, and make sure all the ministers work well on their posts." What this dialogue reveals is not only a general pattern of the relationship between the emperor and the bureaucracy in the Western Han Dynasty before the reign of Emperor Wu but also a Chinese political ideal in both the Huang-Lao and the Confucian traditions, whereby the emperor should act as a ritual head during the court audiences and sacrifices, but not be an active ruler of the country.

The Chinese political system, however, was very different from Western-style constitutional monarchy. Under the Chinese political system, even though the emperor and the bureaucracy had a symbiotic relationship, the power of the chancellor or any members of the bureaucracy and their relationships with the

103. E.g., Li and Du 1993: 2.

104. Ch'ien 1982: 3; Loewe 2006: 10–16; the latter has emphasized the passive nature of the Chinese emperorship. His view, in other words, is almost opposite to that of Balazs 1964: 6. While Loewe has captured a general feature of the Chinese emperorship, the truth lies in between.

105. Lao 2006: 5.

emperor were not constitutionally protected. When an emperor did not trust the chancellor or when an emperor wanted to play a more active and assertive role in politics, then the power of the chancellor and the part of the bureaucracy under his immediate leadership would be undermined. Emperor Wu, the grandson of Emperor Wen, was such an assertive ruler.

Yet despite the assertiveness of Emperor Wu, who was capable of putting to death six of his chancellors,¹⁰⁶ he was unable to challenge the whole bureaucratic body. What Emperor Wu did to strengthen his personal power and the ensuing political consequences were emblematic of imperial China's political dynamics and, therefore, deserve some special attention.

To strengthen his personal power without directly challenging the whole bureaucracy, Emperor Wu enacted two mechanisms that Samuel Finer labels as "the Law of Proximity" and "Law of Inflated Titles."¹⁰⁷ Finer's first law asserts that "the more decisive the personal will of the ruler in the polity, the more influential are those who have the closest and the most continuous access to him." During the reign of Emperor Wu, the powers of the officials who were in charge of the Inner Court were significantly increased and the whole Inner Court greatly expanded.¹⁰⁸ Since the emperor's personal secretaries (masters of the writing), the relatives of emperor's wives, and eunuchs enjoyed great proximity to the emperor, the so-called Law of Proximity also meant the rising power of these people under a more assertive emperor.

This process also set another dynamic in motion, which Finer sums up as the Law of Inflated Titles. Finer believes that the whole dynamic was engendered by an expansion of the size of the intimate circle as it became prestigious, to the point that it was no longer intimate, which pushed the emperor to transfer his trust elsewhere to a closer, more intimate individual or circle.¹⁰⁹ In fact, the Law of Inflated Titles also meant that an emperor tended to create new official bureaus without eliminating the old offices with similar functions. The emperor tended to do so because to destroy an old bureaucratic structure would face much stronger resistance than to hollow it out and create a new one alongside. During the Western Han and later Chinese dynasties, it was generally the case that the old bureaucratic structure just shrank its functions as the bureaus closer to the emperor grew increasingly more powerful. In any event, the whole bureaucracy greatly swelled as a result.¹¹⁰

106. By contrast, no chancellor was killed by any of the four emperors before Emperor Wu. See Yang 2001: 363–6 for a discussion of the relationships between Emperor Wu and his thirteen chancellors.

107. Finer 1997: 490.

108. For example, during the reign of Emperor Wu, the office of his personal secretaries (masters of writing) was expanded into a big bureau headed by four masters who had the power to intervene in all kinds of government activities. By the Eastern Han period, the office of the master of writing further expanded to take over the government activities performed by the Outer Court: Yang 2001: 147.

109. Finer 1997: 491.

110. Du You (735–812 CE), a Tang Dynasty scholar and official, criticized the phenomenon this way: "The old titles are never abolished, but new ones are created everyday." See Zheng 1992a: 20.

The complicated relationship between the emperor and bureaucracy did not end there. Under an assertive and active emperor, as those who were closer to the emperor became increasingly powerful, the role of procedure-based bureaucratic decision making in the government declined, and the regime acquired an autocratic tendency, which immediately created problems. Most importantly, not only were the relatives of the emperor's wives, the emperor's personal secretaries, and the eunuchs by no means more loyal to the emperor than the officials at the Outer Court but the rising power of the Inner Court also induced pernicious palace intrigues. This was exactly what happened during the Han Dynasty after the death of Emperor Wu—the court was alternately dominated by the personalized power of the relatives of the emperor's wives and the eunuchs,¹¹¹ and the palace intrigues among them contributed to the collapse of the Western Han and later the Eastern Han as well. The historical lesson thus provided impelled emperors of the later dynasties to rely more on the bureaucracy. Therefore, the dominant tendency of Chinese rulership after the Han Dynasty was not to promote the power of the Inner Court, but to create more and more mechanisms to check the power of the chancellors, generals, and other high-ranking officials.¹¹²

5.2. *The Recommendation System*

The state's practice during the reign of Emperor Wu of requiring each province to recommend an "abundant talent" and each commandery or feudal kingdom to recommend someone "filially pious and incorrupt" to the central government every year, as described earlier, together with a few other methods of recommendation constituted the core of the official recruitment system during the Western Han Dynasty. This recommendation system, however, had three major problems that had a prolonged impact on the history of imperial China before the rise of the civil examination system.

First, since recommendation was largely based on conduct regarded as positive by the state (such as "filially pious and incorrupt," "capable and good" and "sincere and upright"), it greatly motivated people to pretend to display such conduct. For instance, *Hou Hanshu*, "Biography of Xu Jing," carries a story that after Xu Jing's grandfather was recommended for being "filially pious and incorrupt" and became an official,¹¹³ in order to promote his two younger brothers, he divided the family property into three portions and took the best part, and made his two younger brothers courteously receive their smaller portions. The two younger brothers thus earned good reputations in the local area and subsequently received recommendations and became officials. Moreover, a few

111. Li 2002: 200–2.

112. Lin 1992.

113. Xu Jing was a grantee remonstrant during the Eastern Han Dynasty. Also see the English translation of this story in Chü 1972: 299.

years after the two younger brothers had become officials, the older brother assembled his kinsmen and revealed the true motives behind the obviously unfair division of the family property among three brothers. He told his kinsmen that he still felt very sorry for having taken much more property than he should, that the property through his good management had increased three-fold, and that he now decided to give this to his two younger brothers. Xu Jing's grandfather was widely praised in his commandery because of this. It is easy to find other similar stories in the Han received texts. Obviously, the Han Dynasty's official recruitment structure facilitated the development of an elite culture marred by pretentiousness and hypocrisy, a development that deviated from one of the recommendation system's original purposes—to select officials with good morals.

Second, since the numbers of individuals that a local government could recommend to the center was very small, but the local talents were naturally many, this led to the development of two related problems. (1) Since “qualified” candidates were many, recommendation became a great favor of the officials who had power to make the recommendation and select officials among them. The officials used the power of recommendation to extend nepotistic networks and the individuals who were recommended regarded their recommenders as patrons. This facilitated the emergence of large patron-client cliques among the officials during the Eastern Han era. (2) Since the individuals in politically more powerful families had more chances to be recommended, the development also allowed many already important families to grow bigger and more powerful.

Third, the examinations attached to the recommendation system encouraged private schooling. Yet the nature of the recommendation system meant that the sons and pupils of the teachers with powerful political connections were much more likely to be recommended. Therefore, many people jammed the doors of those politically powerful teachers. A famous teacher at the time thus could have several thousand pupils under his name, and his family members could rise up to the rank of the three excellencies for multiple generations.¹¹⁴ This kind of private mentoring system encouraged the domination of nepotism and big families in Han politics.¹¹⁵ By the late part of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the big families dominated the political landscape. The officials in the Han bureaucracy turned into an aristocratic class. This very strong aristocratic tendency of the bureaucracy was to shape Chinese social structure for almost a millennium,¹¹⁶ and would break down only during the Tang Dynasty, largely thanks to the introduction of the civil examination system as a new way of official selection.

114. Huang 1985: chapter 11; Zheng 1992b: 202–4.

115. Huang 1985: chapter 11 and 1989: 108–15; Ch'ien 1982: 34; Wang 1981: chapter 7.

116. Chü 1972.

5.3. *The Censorial System and Flexibility of the Chinese Bureaucracy*

A significant feature of the Chinese bureaucracy, which has had a great impact even on the nature of modern Chinese bureaucracy, is its high level of flexibility in the jurisdictions of different bureaus. The existence of this high level of flexibility must have had a good deal to do with the emperor's capability and desire to maintain his personal power in the government, but gradually it became part of the Chinese political culture. This feature of the bureaucracy can best be illustrated by the frequent changes of the Han Dynasty censorial institutions. The top-rank censorial officials usually had direct access to the emperor and tended to be influential. Moreover, the very existence of the censorial institution indicated the emperor's strong desire to harness and to add his own input to the work of the officialdom. In comparison with the other branches of the government body, the functions of the censorial institutions tended to be more flexible.¹¹⁷

During the Han Dynasty, when the institution of the inspectors had just been initiated, the inspector was just a 600-shi lower-ranked position with no permanent office at the local levels. By the dynasty's late years, during the reign of Emperor Wu, however, social conflicts intensified and numerous medium- to large-scale uprisings occurred. The local commandery governments proved to be ineffective in handling the situation. For over a hundred years, the major duties of the commandery governments were to handle the routine administrative activities such as taxation, local population census, and land measurement, flood control and famine relief, local crime control and legal cases, bookkeeping, and documentation of government activity. Their military capacity was quite limited, and as a political unit the commandery was also too small for suppressing major cross-commandery uprisings. Under these circumstances, the central state started to let inspectors play a major role in local governance and in leading suppression of uprisings. The power of the inspectors was greatly expanded as a result.¹¹⁸ Late during the Western Han Dynasty, the inspectors had offices in each *zhou* (province). They acquired the power of commanding local troops, recommending local talented men, making laws, and administering the provincial-level government. Their official rank was raised to 2,000 *shi* and their title was changed to shepherd.

However, after the shepherd's office had turned into a full-blown government institution, the state's censorial branch was greatly weakened. This led to problems such as the increase of official corruption and wrongdoing.¹¹⁹ Facing these problems, the Western Han state abolished the shepherd system and restored

117. During the Tang Dynasty, for example, Empress Wu (r. 690–705 CE) frequently expanded and downsized the censorial branches and freely established various ad hoc institutions to create her own institutional base and to push forward policies. The size of the censorial body could expand as much as over tenfold in some years under her reign: Lou and Liu 1992: 373. Empress Wu was the only female ruler of the state in Chinese history who formally assumed the title of "emperor."

118. Wang 2006: 33–41.

119. Wang 2006: 51.

the 600-*shi* rank inspectors by the end of the reign of Emperor Cheng (r. 33–7 BCE). Later in the Han Dynasty, the general pattern was that inspectors would turn to the highly powerful shepherds when a county was in great turmoil. When the country was enjoying peace and prosperity, the state tended to abolish the shepherd system and restore the institution of inspectors. Nevertheless, institutions are not switches that can be turned on and off with no unintended consequences. The fact was, whenever the central government abolished the shepherd system and returned to the censorially oriented system of inspectors, the new shepherd-turned-inspectors would wield much more power than the early inspectors. The inspectors of the Eastern Han government wielded much greater administrative and military power than their Western Han counterparts because of this. In 184 CE, social and political turmoil triggered the Yellow Turban Rebellion. Although the rebellion itself was suppressed within a year, more medium- to large-scale rebellions ensued.¹²⁰ To deal with the rebellions more effectively, the state once again turned the inspector system into the shepherd system. This time, however, the state was never able to switch it back. Instead, the shepherds turned the domains under their control into de facto independent states, which led to the end of the Han Dynasty and rise of the Three Kingdoms (220–280 CE) and the Western Jin Dynasty (265–316 CE).

5.4. *The “Problems” of the Clerks*

The Chinese bureaucracy maintained a clear distinction between officials and clerks. During the Han Dynasty, while most clerks would find it hard to rise above the 400-*shi* rank, a few of them were able to advance to the very top of the officialdom.¹²¹ Nevertheless, in the course of Chinese history the division between officials and clerks gradually widened. By the Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty (1644–1922 CE), officials were mostly recruited from those who had passed civil examinations, while clerks were recruited from those who had received special training in techniques in handling various routine government activities. Moreover, by the Ming and Qing Dynasties, clerks had almost become political outcasts in being forbidden to serve as censors, denied any opportunity to rise to the top, and even not being allowed to take the highest-level civil examinations. Why did the development of the Chinese bureaucracy follow such a trajectory? To answer the question, we must look more closely at the differences between officials and clerks and the problems caused for the bureaucracy as a result of the differences.¹²²

120. Wang 2006: 88.

121. Liao 2005: chapter 1; Ch'ien 1982: 105.

122. According to Ch'ien 1982: 105, the complete separation of the tracks of officials and clerks originated during the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368 CE). Ch'ien argues that the top officials during the Yuan Dynasty were often Mongols who were inexperienced in administrative matters and unable to read Chinese. Educated Chinese, on the other hand, had no alternative but to offer their services as clerks. This led to a complete separation of the official and clerk tracks. I would argue that, while Yuan Dynasty politics must have played a role here, the widening gap between the two tracks started long before the Yuan Dynasty. What happened during the Ming and Qing Dynasties looks more like a general pattern of development than a consequence of Yuan Dynasty politics.

During the Han Dynasty, officials and clerks had the following three differences. First, while the officials mostly entered the officialdom through recommendations based on their virtuous conduct and their excellence in Confucian learning, the clerks entered the bureaucracy based on their expertise in handling routine governmental activities such as legal cases, information gathering and bookkeeping, taxation and accounting, and preparing the reports to the higher-level government. As a result, the clerks knew much more about the actual working and loopholes of the bureaucratic machine than the officials. Moreover, while officials were not allowed to serve in their native places and would be rotated every few years to new posts to prevent their personal power from being accumulated in any given location, clerks were allowed to serve at their hometowns for life. Finally, while the Han Dynasty clerks did have some chances to move up through the official ranks, such chances were much smaller in comparison with the officials who were selected from the recommendation system. The clerks were in general less motivated than the officials while doing their jobs.

Yet while the officials and clerks were very different, officials were compelled to rely on the clerks. The clerks were more knowledgeable about local politics, about how the government operated, and about the legal codes and the ways they should be interpreted under various situations. They also had nurtured extensive local networks with the people who spoke the same dialect and were connected through blood relations, friendships, and interlocked interests. Their familiarity with local politics and their special expertise made them indispensable to the officials who lacked local ties and the practical knowledge of governance. The top-level government's obsession with information gathering and bookkeeping also deepened the officials' reliance on the clerks' expertise.¹²³

The above conditions gave rise to several real as well as perceived characteristics of the clerks that were widely discussed in the Han Dynasty as well as later dynasties. There are records documenting how clerks took the opportunity during the political vacuum created by the transition between governors to destroy some of the financial records of money embezzlement and how clerks tried to falsely balance financial records to cheat officials. In the historical sources, there are also stories about how a newly appointed official was mistreated or manipulated by a clique of the local clerks and how the clerks were able to control an official by their special knowledge and personal networks. Various historical sources also provide stories on how the clerks of higher-level government officials extorted from and bullied the officials at lower-level governments when the local officials went to the offices of the high-level government for businesses, and how the local clerks used their legal expertise to acquit or convict an individual who actually committed or did not commit a crime. Stories like this can go on

123. In some cases, local officials wanted to hire skillful clerks, but ones with no morals to help them to balance the books and write better reports. This was especially true by the end of the dynasty when the whole government began to break down: Gao 1998: 193–4.

and on.¹²⁴ In short, in Han and later sources, clerks were frequently depicted as “cunning clerks,” “wicked clerks,” or “vermin clerks” and deplored in a way similar to the derogative images that today’s lawyers have sometimes received. Regardless of the truth value of these attacks, what is important here is that once the accusations were widely accepted among officials, the officials would naturally use their more prestigious status and power to curtail the power of the clerks, which led to the continuing decline of the political status of the clerks in the bureaucracy.

6. BUREAUCRACY AND MODERNITY

Bureaucracy has usually been associated with rule-driven decision making, calculative spirit, and efficiency, and has, therefore, been regarded as distinctively modern.¹²⁵ Weber, for example, argues that “[b]ureaucracy . . . is fully developed in political and ecclesiastical communities only in the modern state, and, in the private economy, only in the most advanced institutions of capitalism.”¹²⁶ Löwy and Sayre argue that bureaucratic domination forms a principal characteristic of modernity.¹²⁷ Under this modern-traditional dichotomy two puzzles arise. First, why was the bureaucratic mode of governance widespread long before the rise of modernity in places such as ancient Egypt, the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and the Chinese Empire?¹²⁸ Second, why was the bureaucratic mode of governance, unlike its modern twin—the market economy—which was obviously suppressed by political and ideological forces and unable to reach domination until the rise of industrial capitalism, able to dominate in a sustained fashion in a country like China for over two thousand years? In the final part of this chapter, I argue that while the domination of market relations in social and political life is distinctively modern, bureaucracy is not. In other words, there is nothing special in China having developed a sophisticated bureaucracy long before the onset of modernity.

Modernity has typically been associated with the following set of phenomena that are regarded as having emerged in the West and gradually risen to domination first in the West and then spreading to the rest of the world in a process called “modernization”: calculation, bureaucracy, rationality, capitalism, disenchantment, industrialization, individualism, science.¹²⁹ This kind of understanding of being modern, however, has received more and more criticism. In the field of China-Europe comparison, for example, scholars who study the issue

124. See Bu 2002: 305–6; Li and Du 1993: 8 for discussions of the “problems of clerks” in more detail.

125. Eisenstadt 1987: 6–8.

126. Weber 1946: 196.

127. Löwy and Sayre 2001.

128. Eisenstadt 1963: 11.

129. Adams, Clemens, and Orloff 2005: 14.

of the rise of capitalism and industrialization have tried to show that eighteenth-century China was very similar to England (the most advanced part of Western Europe) in terms both of the people's living standard and the extensiveness of market relations, and that England was able to have an eventual breakthrough to industrial capitalism only because it benefited from coal and other resources that it had extracted from the New World.¹³⁰ On the issue of science, some scholars argue that the rise of modern Western sciences had little to do with the Greek scientific traditions, that modern science did not exist in any civilizations before the eighteenth century, and that premodern forms of science were as well developed in China as in Europe.¹³¹ On the issue of bureaucratization, Woodside regards not only the bureaucracy of imperial China as modern but also its decline after the arrival of the West as a "loss of modernity."¹³² In short, these scholars want to show that the established binary between modern and traditional societies is an exaggeration, and that while some of the differences between modernity and tradition still hold, the rise of modernity is by no means a distinctively Western project, because similar traits of what we today consider as modern existed in many parts of the non-Western world that were developing their own modernities.

I have argued elsewhere that the above kind of politically correct criticisms of the traditional understandings of modernity and its Western origins are generally misleading.¹³³ Nevertheless, I must also stress that these politically correct criticisms play a positive role: they have ripped off one by one the rigid dichotomies derived from the traditional understanding of the meaning of modernity and showed quite clearly that many characteristics that we consider as modern such as science, capitalism, bureaucracy, and rationality might actually not be modernity's core meaning. So what has made today's society so different from that of a few centuries ago? And why is bureaucracy not modern?

In my forthcoming book, I address these questions by differentiating two kinds of instrumental rationalities: public-oriented instrumental rationality and private-oriented instrumental rationality.¹³⁴ By public-oriented instrumental rationality, I mean a kind of rationality aiming at gaining efficiency and power within a collective such as the family, tribe, or state. By private-oriented instrumental rationality, I refer to a kind of rational calculation aiming at personal gains or gains for a privately owned company. I argue that the most important force that drove us to the "modern" is a process of what I call valuation of private-oriented instrumental rationality (not simply the rise of instrumental rationality), and that most other characteristics that early scholars considered as modern are either derived

130. Pomeranz 2000.

131. Lloyd 1996, 2002, and 2004; Lloyd and Sivin 2002.

132. Woodside 2006.

133. Zhao forthcoming a.

134. Zhao forthcoming b.

as the constitutive components or the consequences of the valuation of the private-oriented instrumental rationality or simply irrelevant. The core mechanism behind my argument is that while private-oriented means-ends calculation is instinctive to humans, it was heavily suppressed and marginalized in traditional societies, because it was then regarded as purely selfish and unable to sustain the attacks from most of the value-rational arguments. It was not until after the rise of such ideas as liberalism, individualism, and their economic twin “the invisible hand” that instrumental calculations acquired a positive value (what I call the valuation process), and could be openly promoted and practiced without much pressure. This change liberated a large part of the formerly suppressed human nature, and facilitated the spread and domination of private-oriented instrumental rationality and the resultant gigantic energy of creativity in all spheres of life, some of which we now label as disenchantment, industrialization, capitalism, and so on. My logic also leads to the conclusion that, as long as one is willing to accept that liberalism, individualism, and the “invisible hand,” and the historical forces that led to their rises, originated in the West and nowhere else, one should also accept the conclusion that modernity was for better and for worse a Western project.

Bureaucracy, however, is not modern. Even though bureaucracy highly values rule-guided decision-making processes aiming at predictability and efficiency, its goal is to maximize public-oriented rather than private-oriented gain. This kind of instrumentalism not only does not pose a fundamental threat to most value-based rationalities but also is essential to the defense and expansion of the power of any value-based organizations and ideologies. This was exactly the case in premodern China. During the Western Zhou Dynasty, bureaucracy was largely developed out of the need to effectively organize and supervise rule-driven ritual proceedings and to select capable leaders in an increasingly complicated familial state constructed according to the Western Zhou feudal arrangement. Later on, thirst for efficiency created by the war-driven competition during the Warring States era facilitated the spread and domination of a bureaucratic mode of governance all over China proper. Most China specialists have regarded this process that happened in early China in terms of a precocious rise of modernity. They miss the point, because what crystallized in China at the time was a well-developed public-oriented instrumental rationality (i.e., bureaucracy), which was not at all contradictory, but instead proved to be of great assistance to the domination of Confucianism, or a kind of value-based rationality.

The Common Denominator

Late Roman Imperial Bureaucracy from a Comparative Perspective

Peter Eich

1. METHODOLOGICAL PREMISES: UNE HISTOIRE À NAÎTRE? BUREAUCRACY AS A TOPIC OF RESEARCH

“Comment parler de l’histoire de la bureaucratie...?”¹ On est nécessairement dans l’embarras, car c’est une histoire fort incertaine de ses méthodes, qui n’a ni ‘patrons’ ni corps de doctrine, une histoire peu fréquentée alors que chacun subit, dans sa vie quotidienne, la tutelle attentive de la bureaucratie sous toutes ses formes.”² These introductory remarks taken from Guy Thuillier may cause some eyebrows to lift, since the amount of research done on the topic of bureaucracy over the last 150 years hardly seems negligible. Still, Thuillier has a point. Many studies dealing with bureaucracy or one special administration merely offer description without theoretical underpinning; they use terms such as “bureaucracy” as if they were neutral descriptions of any kind of political system or any form of administration. But such terms are no mere gambling chips. They are deeply embedded in a cultural matrix and they carry various, even contradictory meanings. This has again been stressed recently by a new school of analysis of political communication.³ But for any historian there is nothing new to the idea. If the basis of communication and description

1. I would like to thank Walter Scheidel for inviting me to the conference in 2008. I wrote this chapter in early 2009. Some of the material presented here has since been used for a short essay on Roman administration (Eich 2012). Since 2009, a lot of work has been done on the topics under discussion here. Only selective expansion of the bibliography was possible in the final revision of this work. Certain newer studies published since 2009 also pertain to the principal agency theory or relate to the work of Edgar Kiser. Debate with these studies is out of place in a work of synthetic scholarship, given the level of specialist detail and exhaustive argument required. This conversation must therefore take place elsewhere. In what follows, I try to give a general sketch of the late Roman administration and its development through time. Given the reliance of most historians of Rome on detailed analysis of the source material, the problems of such an approach are obvious. The concentration on the Roman Empire and some aspects of Chinese history is problematic as well. A broader view of empires and ancient states, their characteristics and differences, would certainly provide helpful, and sometimes even necessary, insights. This, again, is not feasible here. As to further reading in this huge field of research, I restrict myself to mentioning only two important recent studies: Bang and Scheidel 2013; von Reden forthcoming.

2. Thuillier 1999–2001: vol. 1: 1.

3. See Hampshire-Monk, Tilmans, and van Vree 1998.

is merely a vague sense of familiarity with the words used, any deeper insights into complicated processes are hardly to be expected.

Even worse, many studies on the subject of bureaucracy are biased in one way or another: the phenomenon very often manifests in a strong, if vague, dislike, a feeling shared by people on the ideological right as well as on the left.⁴ On the other hand, bureaucratic rule was and still is associated with rational rule by seminal sociological analyses made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so to call an administration bureaucratic may even signify a mark of esteem. In the historical research of the last decades, we find all kinds of tendentious uses of the term “bureaucracy,” and all of them have severely hampered our understanding of this type of organization and its functional mechanisms. Let us briefly look at a very pertinent example from recent work on early China. In 2002 Li Feng published a lengthy article on the Western Zhou government administration and its functional principles, based mainly on a number of bronze inscriptions from the period.⁵ Li Feng considers these inscriptions (mostly commemorating the appointment of an official) as evidence for his theory that at this stage of Chinese history there existed a highly effective bureaucracy, characterized by specialization of tasks, impersonality, and abstract rules. Working on inscriptions myself I am fully aware of the problems faced by every epigrapher in attempting to extract a story from a usually very rigid and repetitive text scheme. More important, as I cannot read the language, the whole situation may very well be considered (to quote the former French president Jacques Chirac) “une bonne occasion de se taire.” But if the translations given by Li Feng are accurate, there is nothing in these inscriptions to prove his point. In fact, their contents agree fairly well with a political system that (for the present purpose) can loosely be called feudal.⁶ Indeed, Li Feng seems to acknowledge the problems of his approach; at the end of the article, he suggests that the Western Zhou administration was in fact much nearer to Weber’s concept of a “patrimonial bureaucracy.”⁷ Although this comment is certainly much closer to the truth than the preceding remarks, this mild concluding reservation can hardly be called a thorough analysis of the gulf that separates a rather rudimentary patrimonial bureaucracy and a rationally functioning modern bureaucracy. The body of the analysis is not convincing, if not backed by other evidence. Only in the Warring States period, and especially in Qin, was a centralized, authoritarian, militarized rule established⁸ that can be labeled bureaucratic.⁹

4. Eich 2008a.

5. Li 2001–2.

6. This label is obviously only a starting point. See the discussion in Wickham 2000. Though this is an outsider’s view, in almost every case I agree with the interpretations of M. Lewis 1997, whose views are contested by Li Feng. Cf. Brooks and Brooks 1998: 117.

7. Li 2001–2: 54. See also Zhao in this volume, chapter 3.

8. Lewis 2007: 18ff.; Kaufman 1997: 174; Kiser and Cai 2003. The label “bureaucratic,” however, needs further qualification. The very direct, militarized rule institutionalized by Shang Yang with his emphasis on military squads and militarized discipline is not what modern theoreticians have in mind when they discuss a bureaucracy (Kiser and Cai 2003).

9. This being said, in the following pages an ideal concept of Chinese bureaucracy occasionally will be compared with a historical analysis of the Roman Empire focusing on a reality very different from any ideal type.

Finally, there is a rather more special reason why scholars, especially those of an anglophone background, tend to neglect the “histoire de la bureaucratie.” For decades it was a well-established belief, rooted in generations of textbooks, that Great Britain had taken a very special route to statehood; huge bureaucracies are often associated with Continental European, meaning more-or-less unsuccessful, ways of development. But recent scholarship has shown quite clearly that the similarities between the genesis of the modern state in Britain and Central Europe by far outweigh the differences in importance.¹⁰ The concept of the state (in the modern sense of the word) and the concept of bureaucracy and bureaucratization are closely interrelated, in Britain as elsewhere.

Bureaucracies and their development, then, are a very legitimate topic of research. But this is not to say that a few indications of the existence of some sort of a precursor to modern bureaucracy imply that the political system under analysis had entered a single predetermined trajectory leading also to fully fledged statehood in the modern sense of the word. We evidently need a better set of analytical tools to approach the phenomenon of bureaucratization. Though there have been patterns (to which I will turn shortly), every single process of bureaucratization was deeply embedded in its given structural framework. The seminal work on these various historical processes of bureaucratization was the huge œuvre of Max Weber (1864–1920).¹¹ Weber developed models of political organizations, combining different “structural contexts” with various “configurations of recruitment and monitoring,” to create type concepts that he considered to be heuristic devices.¹² Having influenced a whole generation of scholars, his methods as well as his results have become the target of various criticisms since the 1960s, culminating in an almost complete rejection. All too often, though, only one of the elements of his rather complicated models was singled out to prove him wrong. On the other hand, the dynamic nature of his ideal types was often misunderstood. While Weber’s macromodels have been deemed inflexible, his remarks on the microfoundations of the action of the participants in the various historical configurations that he analyzes, portrayed as a complex web of instrumental and noninstrumental action, have often been ignored. But more recently it has been observed how many of the socioeconomic developments of postmodern societies Weber anticipated, and to what a high degree his type concepts are compatible with recent reevaluations of the past.¹³ Since the nineties, then, the focus has become thoroughly “Neo-Weberian.”¹⁴ That is not to say that we can simply return to Weberian positions without taking into account the quantity of research carried out since

10. Braun 1975: 316; Brewer 1989; cf. Asch 1995.

11. Quotations are from Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich’s translation of Weber’s *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Weber 1978).

12. See the excellent article of Kiser and Baer 2005: 228 for the terminology and further discussion. It must be noted that it is almost impossible to translate Weber’s very dense language.

13. Anter 2007.

14. Hall and Taylor 1996.

his days. There can be no doubt that the empirical data that Weber had assembled were quite often insufficient or supplemented by incorrect assumptions to fill the gaps. But the methodology and general approach have proved to be useful starting points for new analyses of political organizations and their social basis. A case in point is the above-cited article by Li Feng, whose aim seems to be to highlight the modernity of Western Zhou governmental principles by proving them bureaucratic. To do so, Li Feng has to avoid calling on Weber, whom he criticizes for allegedly not defining the term “bureaucracy,” relying on Eugene Kamenka instead.¹⁵ But in the very paragraph quoted, Kamenka refers to Weber as his source. It would seem simpler to stick to Weber’s original propositions, which were later to be adapted to new sociological insights.

Weber always stressed that in his view the triumph of bureaucracy was brought about by its “technical superiority.”¹⁶ The single most important characteristic of a modern bureaucracy in his analysis is that it relies on the superior, specialized technical knowledge of the officeholders. It is for this reason that candidates are appointed for the task at hand and are carefully vetted before entry into the administration. Conduct of official business does not only have to be rule bound, as often assumed. These rules have to be an abstract set of either “technical rules or norms” that in themselves are constructed rationally and preclude arbitrary decisions. This rationality, then, serves to legitimize the action of the bureaucracy and its members. Weber lists more characteristics of a modern “rational” and “legal” bureaucracy in his treatment of the type concept of such an organization.¹⁷ But while he considered other components of this ideal type contingent and sometimes even wholly expendable, he deemed the first ones mentioned as absolutely essential. To my knowledge, no premodern administration ever reached the standard set in this type concept, a conclusion shared by most sociologists.¹⁸ Accepting Weber’s analysis then as a first orientation we can hold it as established that the Roman Empire was never bureaucratic in the sense of the word given above.

But a bureaucracy is characterized as well by a certain kind of organizational framework. Though Weber defines these structures and mechanisms of the bureaucratic setup as secondary features, they were obviously stereotypical components of all bureaucratic administrations. Some of them, like regular pensions for

15. Li 2001–2: 2. See Kamenka 1989: 157.

16. Weber 1978: 973.

17. Weber 1978: 217ff; appointment: 220.

18. See, e.g., Luhmann 1968: 51. Cf. Eisenstadt 1958. Weber was of course well aware of the tests Chinese administrators had to pass from an early stage of the process of bureaucratization, but he did not consider these exams competitive. (But cf. Zhao in this volume, chapter 3.) Neither did he think of them as a means to disseminate a culture of specific bureaucratic knowledge. In his analysis, the tests were conceived as a way to foster social and moral education in the prevailing values of the societies. This assessment still seems basically correct. See below, note 272. Neither did Chinese Warring States rulers or the later emperors have anything like a “legal competence” (Weber 1978: 220). These qualifications do not take away from the fact that early Chinese administration came much closer to the ideal concept of bureaucracy than did the Roman counterpart.

retirees, were certainly late addenda to the catalog of characteristics of this type of organization. But others antedate the very concept of rational rule or the necessity to pick candidates of advanced education by competitive examinations because of the technical challenges posed by the complexity of the conduct of official business in modernity. Among the more important of these functional principles were the development of spheres of responsibility, later in this chapter somewhat inaccurately called competence (as opposed to sheer arbitrariness), the hierarchical organization of the staff based on these spheres (as opposed to reliance on the social status of the various actors for structuring the staff), or a high degree of record keeping (including not only census data and official correspondence with the outside world but also the internal operations of the administration). These functional principles have been adopted by various historical administrations at different times in a processual way; this slow and at times haphazard manner of implementation makes it very difficult to establish standards for measuring the degree of “bureaucratic effectiveness” of any administration. Some studies tend to term all staffs organized in the way described bureaucracies, but more serious analyses of administrative systems make it clear that such organizations are not full-fledged, “Weberian” bureaucracies but premodern versions of his type concept, precursors as it were, although such a characterization adds a problematic touch of teleology hardly appropriate from the historical point of view. Weber himself devised the concept of “patrimonial bureaucracy” to categorize these protobureaucracies. Unfortunately this concept, which he defined differently at different stages of his life, remained somewhat vague.¹⁹ Basically, he seems to have been thinking of what some scholars today call the domain state, a political system based to a significant degree on the estates of the power elite and especially the ruler who governs his territory more or less in the same way as he sees to his personal property. Weber did not comment on the question of at which point typically a household administration begins to be transformed into a patrimonial bureaucracy. He hinted only at a process of intensification behind this transformation.²⁰ While his type concept “patrimonial bureaucracy” certainly has merits, it is not particularly suitable for conceptualizing the various processes of bureaucratization that I shall discuss shortly. But I return to the usefulness of the notion of a “patrimonial bureaucracy” in section 3.

My last preliminary remark concerns historiographic trends. This volume aims at comparison or, for that matter, refutation of comparability. While it is not absolutely essential to it, comparison is made much easier when scholars agree on a general framework characterizing their subjects. Concerning the later Roman Empire, there is indeed general agreement, but only in so far as what the empire was *not*. The great narratives of the past have been discarded, to be replaced

19. See Eich 2011.

20. Weber 1978: 1028ff. See also the rather vague comments at 971ff.

by excellent analyses much more limited in scope.²¹ The new picture to emerge is unfortunately still very patchy. The various new components do not yet seem to fit too well together right now. This constellation will make it more difficult at times to be content with a mere sketch referring the reader to the consensus of scholars that Karl Popper once proposed as the proper form of verification in the realm of the social sciences.

2. THE ORIGINS OF ROMAN PROTOBUREAUCRATIC ADMINISTRATION AND ITS ULTIMATE PURPOSE

It may seem rather far off the mark to start a discussion of late Roman times with some remarks on the Roman Republic, a form of government abolished in the political turmoil that led to the rule of Augustus (31/27 BCE). However, it is not the intention of this essay to give an exhaustive account of the anatomy of the late Roman administration. Rather, the objective of Zhao's and my own chapters is a comparison of Chinese and Roman bureaucratization that includes the respective starting points and their evolution over time. Thus, for the purpose of this chapter, the genesis of the Roman protobureaucracy is at least as important as the description of any single feature of the late Roman administration. If the term "traditional society" was ever correctly applied to a society, it was surely so in the case of Rome. The single most important factor in Roman public life had been the expansion of the commonwealth since the late fourth century BCE. By the end of the first century BCE, the former medium-size Italian city-state had vanquished every significant opponent in the Mediterranean basin. The aggressive wars that led to this outcome were championed by an aristocratic elite, conducted by aristocratic generals, and coordinated by the Senate, the governing body of the Republic, dominated by this same elite. The collective memory of Rome was certainly molded by the experience of this expansion, generally considered a success story. The political system that made such achievements possible could not be simply done away with, even after its core political value, the common rule of an aristocratic status group, succumbed to a series of civil wars, leading to the rise of what both ancients and moderns call the principate, a monarchy in all but name. The heritage of the aristocratic Republic was one of the most important characteristics of the new system, as witnessed above all by the position of the emperor. Though the Roman monarchy certainly had a dynastic element, the "emperors" never became officially hereditary. During the high empire, the Senate and the people of Rome were supposed to elect the emperors, even if, in fact, the army created the rulers.²² Even more important for our subject, the administration of the Republic was in fact completely nonbureaucratic. That is not to say

21. Wiemer 2006; Gwynn 2008.

22. See Ferrary 2001.

that the agents of the Republic did not handle quite a lot of paperwork. But the bulk of this related to the census, and depended on the subjects' own reporting. The Roman administration was tiny, designed for the needs of a city and never adapted to the requirements of the commonwealth that had been established by the continuous wars of the Republic. Aristocratic status groups in premodern times were hardly able to control a complex administration that as a rule needed a monocratic organization to allow for effective monitoring. But the Roman nobles, preferring to share power more or less equally, could ill afford to let one of their members take the helm of such an organization for a longer period of time. Nor were they prepared to leave any sophisticated administration to its own devices since that would have created a new political center outside their control. Any ambitious administrator could have used such an apparatus as a stepping-stone to unrepublican power. Roman nobles therefore opted against an organization they considered a potential threat.

That does not mean, however, that republican rule was absolutely haphazard or even chaotic. Quite to the contrary, the elite maintained control of its influence in Italy by both military and peaceful means. I cannot go much deeper into this subject, but I will briefly note the two most important strategies adopted by the Roman nobility in governing the empire. First, warfare was a constant feature of Roman life. I have argued elsewhere that the often loosely applied label of imperialism does not carry enough analytical potential to help us understand the aims and effects of Roman aggressiveness. My brother and I have proposed that Roman warfare neatly fits the model of a certain type of "state-building process"²³ (in fact, the very first stage of such a process) that has been posited by sociologists as underpinning coercion-intensive regions in a nearly universal way.²⁴ According to this theory, rudimentary "states" develop from violence-controlling organizations. Typically, political systems in coercion-intensive regions attempt to monopolize violence in their territory. Therefore, such systems traditionally engage in continuous warfare to assert their power, eliminate rivals, and extract the necessary resources. That was more or less precisely the pattern the Roman Republic followed. The Roman army was the foundation of a *res publica* without the institutional framework necessary to cope with long periods of peace. The concentration on the core political activities in a coercion-intensive region allowed the Roman power elites slowly to subsume an ever-growing part of Italy into a new type of political framework.

The army, then, was by far the largest formalized organization in the Roman political system. Most free-born male Italians had to serve some period under Roman generals, a fact that helped create the notion of a Roman commonwealth.

23. Eich and Eich 2005. The paragraph above partly summarizes our argument, partly quotes the summary of the article on 31.

24. See, e.g., Tilly 1985.

This army was a militia of conscript peasants up to the time when the Republic after a series of civil wars was finally replaced by a new, effectually monarchical political system (with the first century BCE bearing all the marks of a transition phase). I shall return to the crucial changes under Augustus presently. First, I want to deal with other, nonmilitary resources of the political elites in republican and early imperial times. Having secured military victory, Rome created a wholly new—that is, Roman—concept of space by decisively changing the facts on the ground. For instance, territory of former enemies was occupied and colonies were founded at strategic points.²⁵ Other strategies that were employed derived from and corresponded to the political and social structures that Rome's armies and politicians encountered when they established Roman rule in Italy. When Rome started to build up its empire, its enemies were often the warlike tribes of central Italy. But from the very beginning and more especially later, the Roman conquerors were confronted with the dominant mode of organizing life in the Mediterranean basin (which, of course, was their own as well): the city as an autonomous political entity, with its own elite and leadership. Conquered tribes were at times (but not always or even as a rule) controlled by military force. But urban elites (as well as some tribal chieftains and aristocracies) usually remained in place, presumably mostly after outspoken enemies of Rome had been expelled or killed and friends of Rome had been substituted for them.²⁶ It is against this background that we should see the construction of Roman hegemony, at least in the first centuries of conquest. The emerging new Italian political framework was deeply enmeshed in social relationships primarily based on various types of solidarity: client relationships, friendship, family ties, or social bonds between compatriots. (A variety of economic forms of dependence complemented these relationships.) Except for ties between family members, we can subsume these social bonds under the heading of clientelism, although it should be stressed that this meaning of the term is a modern one; the Roman concept of *clientela* was much more restricted.²⁷ It is crucial to bear this difference in mind because the Latin roots of many modern sociological terms always carry with them the risk of methodologically dangerous confusions. Clientelistic ties are usually dyadic in nature. But the Roman elite (as other elites, for that matter) managed to forge them into a layered system of such relationships.²⁸ From the viewpoint of a modern political observer, such a construct may seem unstable. But this view is clearly mistaken. By binding together the resources of various socially prominent members of the conquered or otherwise subdued communities, who from that

25. See Purcell 1990; Eich forthcoming for further references.

26. Fronda 2010: 30ff.; 315ff.; Lomas 2011: 349; David 2006. Note that I am not discussing the kind of patronage system Rosenstein 2012: 17–8 is interested in. Yet see his remarks (82) on a “network of favors and obligations” in Roman Italy.

27. See, e.g., Saller 1982: 7ff.

28. The best discussion is by Johnson and Dandeker 1989.

point on acted as patronage brokers in their own interest as well as in the interest of their powerful Roman friends, Roman power elites were in control of a vast network of personal ties.²⁹ The Roman “patronage system” was a tightly knit fabric that served its masters well.³⁰ Where this system failed, the Roman army was ready to back Roman wishes. When the empire finally integrated territories outside Italy, this same system with the necessary adaptations was transferred to the provinces. Needless to say, under these circumstances family ties lost their importance, as the asymmetry between center and periphery grew more distinct.³¹ On the other hand, elites even in regions generally considered remote from the center were slowly integrated into the equestrian and senatorial aristocracies.³²

These were the most important means of controlling and directing the society at large and its members that Octavian had at his disposal when he imposed his rule on the Roman *res publica* between 44 and 27 BCE. Clearly, the inauguration of a de facto monarchy opened up the possibility of constructing a much more differentiated administration, such as would enable the central government to establish a more detailed and intensive form of control. This process, however, occurred slowly. In the early and high principate, the existing social order served as the foundation of the emperors’ power, and they took care not to disturb the traditional balance of power in any excessive manner. Given the fact that our sources for the first hundred or even two hundred years of the principate are very much focused on the political configuration in the city of Rome, one may come to the conclusion that the emperors monopolized the resources consisting of solidarity-mediated personal ties from an early point on. Such a judgment would be mistaken. The emperors controlled access to the very valuable resources in the center, but the empire was huge. Not even Italy could be administered by the formal power structures and the emperors’ network of clientelistic ties alone.³³ The emperors needed the chains of personal ties built up by the aristocratic families as much as their economic power to keep the empire together. In this, they did remarkably well; our sources make it quite clear that in the densely populated areas of the Mediterranean basin where urban elites could act as mediators and patronage brokers, the empire was very much present.³⁴ The same probably holds true for areas dominated by large estates, especially if imperial property was a decisive factor in the pattern of landholding. But rural areas are underrepresented in our source material.³⁵

29. See Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.14.4.

30. Roniger 1983; Eich 2005: 67–84.

31. Schulz 1997.

32. For an example see Waelkens 2002.

33. Eck 1979; Millar 1986.

34. Buraselis 1998; Halfmann 2002. I am not convinced by the criticism of Kokkinia 2006.

35. Millar 1986; Crawford 1976; Carlsen 1995. See especially Tacitus, *Annals* 4.6.

As time went by, the huge base of personal supporters of the emperor became more structured. This seems to have been a real evolution, with no distinct external stimuli (at least, no other stimuli than those general forces that will shortly be discussed). "Clientelistic ties" were originally personal and individual. But already the patron-client bonds between whole communities and single politicians or their families were showing a tendency to become more abstract in character. As a result of the sheer workload emperors had to assume in order to maintain their ties with clients as active channels of communication, they tended to let the various relationships become more stereotyped so that eventually groups with similar backgrounds were brought together under one heading (cities in one province, the estate holders of a particular region, legions or even the whole army, etc.). Individual clients were grouped together to become "collective clients."³⁶ This process is difficult to follow closely, since from the second century CE onward we lack the detailed sources with their anecdotal evidence that we have for the first. But the admittedly somewhat one-sided juridical sources, especially from Severan times (193–235 CE), seem to show that the process of systematization had at this stage already reached a fairly high level.³⁷ But only much later, especially in the fourth century, does it become more visible and easier to describe.³⁸ With the growing workload and the actions of all participants becoming more stereotyped, the emperors had to, and were actually in a better position to, delegate some of the problems reaching them. A potential for some sort of bureaucratization was inherent in this process but we lack the sources to analyze it in more detail.

So far, the discussion has dwelt on the specific structure of the social order and the strategies of the power elite in using this structure and its underlying dynamics for their political aims. But this does not mean that besides the army and the emperor, there were no formal power structures. Emperors were supported in the administration by the Senate with its subcommittees and senatorial posts. Augustus set up multiple new senatorial posts, and various other offices were created later. But as already mentioned, the senatorial administration was completely unbureaucratic in nature. There was no significant change in this respect in the imperial period, and even if there may have been some similarities at times and in certain aspects, at least in the case of Rome aristocratic rule and bureaucratic government in their respective pure types were to remain incompatible.

The Roman elite was urban by definition. But from the start, it was a land-based aristocracy as well; all of these estate holders were assisted in their official tasks by freedmen and slaves who were skilled either in managing their masters' land or in some similar enterprise from which Roman aristocrats sought to make

36. Johnson and Dandeker 1989, esp. 238.

37. Coriat 1997.

38. See sections 4 and 5.

a profit. After the establishment of the monarchy, such private agents moved to the center of the public administration, where the *princeps* placed them in administrative positions in addition to their more traditional tasks (which included classic household jobs). They must have been numerous from the beginning and their number would have increased from reign to reign, but there is no way to quantify this group of imperial agents. In the traditional sphere of Roman public life handed down from republican times they had two primary purposes. First, they helped the emperor create a special secretariat for public business, advancing the monitoring capacity of the center to a higher level than at any time before the mid-first century. Second, they were not only responsible for managing the emperor's real estate—which from Augustus's reign onward greatly exceeded all other holdings.³⁹ (Although issues of legal ownership remain unclear, it was certainly the case that no one else was allowed to control larger mines or quarries.) They were responsible for his public financial affairs as well. I will return to this crucial aspect of Roman imperial administration. But first a few more general remarks on the emperor's household administration are in order.

Some degree of structure was certainly needed to organize the work of the imperial slaves and freedmen. Slaves employed on estates or in mines were (probably already for quite a long time before Augustus inaugurated his new form of government) grouped together following principles that resembled the basic structure of the army.⁴⁰ A rather long chain of command is attested at one of the emperor's huge estates in the Bagradas valley.⁴¹ There was a central bureau of many of the various departments of the imperial administration in Rome (*stationes, tabularia*),⁴² but we know next to nothing about how these bureaus actually operated; we do know, though, that most of them operated under a low- or at least not high-ranking official, an arrangement that precluded meaningful hierarchies.⁴³ These imperial agents have quite often been called the Roman bureaucracy.⁴⁴ Jerome France explicitly likened the *familia Caesaris* (a modern term for the imperial slaves and freedmen) to a rationally operating bureaucracy.⁴⁵ This last argument is certainly untenable. The imperial family relied almost exclusively on status (slaves' slaves, slaves, freedmen, extrapatrimonially recruited heads) for internal structuring. Even close to the emperor in the imperial secretariat, the single most important factor in dividing the tasks at hand at a given moment was imperial favor.⁴⁶ As already noted, a peculiar trait of the Roman imperial administration

39. See, e.g., Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 18.35.

40. Columella 1.9.4, 7, 1.8.17; Muñiz Coello 1989; Peachin 1986; cf. Kolb 2000: 276 n. 3.

41. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 8.25943 = *Fontes Iuris Romani Anteiusianiani* 1².101. Cf. *L'Année Epigraphique* 2001: 2083. I am not convinced by the reconstitution of the key passage of this new text proposed in *L'Année Epigraphique* 2001: 2083 p. 715ff.

42. Boulvert 1970.

43. See Eich 2005: 334ff.

44. See, e.g., Brunt 1975: 140–1.

45. France 2007.

46. Eck 1998.

in the first century CE was that heads of central “bureaus” almost always had a lower status and therefore rank than agents who operated on the periphery of the empire. This principle was evidently adopted to avoid clear-cut hierarchies; the emperors wanted to keep the decision-making process as much as possible in their own hands. The emperor’s household administration and its various extensions, then, were certainly not “a rationally operating bureaucracy.” Still, hierarchies existed, and there was a certain rudimentary “specialization” of tasks that had developed before in the big, differentiated households-cum-estates. Administrators coming from the household, though, hardly needed any special knowledge or advanced training other than reading and writing; even literacy cannot be taken for granted, to judge by the Egyptian evidence.⁴⁷ This type of administration can well be described as a patrimonial bureaucracy. The problem with this characterization is that most empires had some form of rudimentary administration, often of a similar character.⁴⁸ The analytical potential of using such an overarching qualification for all these empires is therefore questionable.⁴⁹ Moreover, there exist more specific versions of the type concept “patrimonial bureaucracy” that in our special field of research at least allow for deeper insights into the functional mechanisms of administrative systems in the Mediterranean basin (as will become clearer in the next section). Not much, then, is to be gained by using the vague label of “patrimonial bureaucracy” for the empire of the principate. Though to a certain extent later developments in the Roman Empire were prefigured by the emperor’s household administration and its various extensions, this household administration in itself was clearly lacking in important or even essential characteristics of a historical bureaucracy.⁵⁰

But there was one part of the emperor’s staff that was not a mere extension of older Mediterranean structures of the various types of patriarchal or patrimonial administration. Some considerations of imperial history are occasionally thought banal, being so well known that no further analysis seems necessary: this is the case here. Augustus changed the dynamics of imperial policymaking and administration dramatically when he decided to keep an army permanently under arms after he finally became the sole ruler of the empire. The change to a professional military force had certainly been gradual. In the years before 30 BCE, the Roman legions were engaged in continuous, mostly civil, wars so that it must still have seemed possible to revert to the republican militia army once internal peace had been reestablished. But Augustus, though he sharply reduced the number of

47. See Papyrus Petaus p. 17ff.; 360–1 (doc. 121).

48. See Eisenstadt 1963.

49. On the other hand, such a characterization finds some support in a remark by Weber (1978: 221) that patrimonial bureaucracies differed from rational bureaucracies in that their personnel were recruited from unfree officials, though the standards of such an organization as defined by Weber at this point were certainly not met by the *familia Caesaris*. More importantly, Weber uses this interpretation of a patrimonial bureaucracy only once, having different and more useful explanations to offer in other parts of his vast oeuvre.

50. See Eich 2005: 288–337.

legions that were active in the year 30, slowly established a standing army, thereby burdening the Roman “budget”⁵¹ with the obligation to produce very large amounts of money (and other resources) on a stable basis. Even in a conservative estimate, half the resources extracted from the empire were from that point on tied up in the military “budget.”⁵² The army of the principate was not only a professional one, it was, at least partly, self-sufficient. Many of the management tasks were performed by military personnel.⁵³ The army procured its own weapons and other gear as well as part of the provisions for the troops and the animals.⁵⁴ Its internal organization could well be characterized as bureaucratic; many of the functional principles discussed above as typical for bureaucracies are attested for the legions from an early point on.⁵⁵ But the type concept of bureaucracy is usually applied first and foremost to civil administrations, and I will deal here with the armed forces only insofar as from the time of Augustus they continually acted as stimuli for the development of the civil administration. Still, it is necessary to keep in mind that from the beginning of the principate there existed a huge organization that was a constant source of disturbance in an otherwise fairly homogeneous and stable traditional societal environment. Military units were mostly garrisoned in the frontier provinces to avoid friction as far as possible (and to prepare for further advances). But the ripples of Augustus’s decision to replace the republican militia of conscript peasants with a new monarchic army must have been felt everywhere in the empire, as the resources for the army had to be provided by every region, the rich inner ring of old Mediterranean provinces⁵⁶ as well as less well developed newly acquired territories.⁵⁷

Augustus considerably reduced the number of active units as well as the overall number of troops compared to the levels reached in the last phase of the civil wars. Still, financial difficulties started almost immediately⁵⁸ and seem to have played a major role in the downfall of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty as well as in Hadrian’s decision to renounce Roman claims on the so-called provinces in Mesopotamia.⁵⁹ In or after longer military campaigns, the balance between resources needed and revenues actually obtained must have been precarious. Troops had to be paid in money. No less important, even though the army was partly in charge of its own supplies, it could not be left to its own devices in this respect. Major staples like wheat had to be provided by imperial civil servants, if

51. Lo Cascio 2006.

52. Goldsmith 1987: 55; Hopkins 1980: 125 and 2002: 199–200. The percentage was probably even higher: Duncan-Jones 1994: 45. See Scheidel in this volume, chapter 5.

53. Eich 2009.

54. See, e.g., Whittaker 2002.

55. Stauner 2004.

56. See the by now classic model of Hopkins 1980 and 2002.

57. As now illustrated especially by various new pieces of evidence from Spain: Alföldy 2000 and 2007: 350ff.

58. Augustus, *Res Gestae* 15–17; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.17ff.

59. For Nero, see Suetonius *Nero* 32.1; Wassink 1991: 473–4; for Hadrian, see *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 5.3; Fronto, *Principles of History* 8.

only to avoid permanent friction with the populations in the neighborhood of the garrisons.⁶⁰ As the army's needs could not simply be ignored, the emperor had to carry out the vital task of providing steady and systematic service if he was to survive.

Augustus had faced a politically similar, though structurally different, constellation in the city of Rome. The capital remained the political center of the empire for the first two hundred years of the principate at least. It was here that the political actors defined their roles in a constant interplay within the political configuration. One important factor in this constellation was the collective client of the "people of Rome" who legitimized the new regime of Augustus by ostentatiously supporting him in public rituals in the Forum, the theater, the circus, or other places in response to special situations.⁶¹ In return, Augustus was among other things held responsible for provisioning the capital. Other major cities had to be supplied as well, but only in Rome could failure in this task have a backlash that could destabilize a *princeps's* position.⁶² From the very start of the so-called principate, Augustus was faced with supply crises in the capital. The first *princeps* is sometimes portrayed as a political genius, inventing a new politicoadministrative system from scratch in 27 BCE. Such a characterization is misleading. Augustus almost exclusively made use of solutions, mechanisms, and structures he found when he launched his career. It took him decades to create stable and effective new structures, capable of dealing with the two essential problems: supplying the capital and the army. In order to avoid unrest that might threaten his own position, the *princeps* needed to placate these citizen groups (that is, the inhabitants of the capital and the soldiers). In time, this became the single most important task of the whole imperial administration. And the staff members commissioned to perform these duties (together with the praetorian prefects) became the core of a new administrative system.

In the system inaugurated by Augustus, the emperor was himself the governor of most (and later of every) military province of the empire. Roman proconsuls under the Republic had far-reaching powers that the center had found increasingly difficult to monitor. Augustus sent legates to his provinces, subordinated to him by law and social ties. (Soldiers on secondment assisted these governors; a fulltime professional provincial administration was not created before the late third century.) Moreover, from 27 BCE on,⁶³ he increasingly appointed a new type of agent in his provinces who acted independently of the governor: the equestrian procurator. (Procurators operated in the public provinces as well.) Later in his reign, Augustus appointed four high-ranking equestrian prefects as his representatives in Rome: two commanders of the imperial guard, the head of

60. Mitthof 2001: 37ff.; Marichal 1992: 75; Speidel 1996: 76; Christol 1989.

61. Veyne 1976.

62. See Alföldy 1989.

63. For the triumviral period (43–33/1 BCE), see Eich 2005: 94–98.

the fire brigades, and the prefect of the *annona*, responsible for supplying the city. Their tasks will be discussed below. First, I want to deal with their status.

Membership in the senatorial order became hereditary in early imperial times; the ethos of the senators was and remained decisively aristocratic.⁶⁴ Throughout the principate, the senate was the emblem of aristocratic rule, supported in this position by the great majority of the emperors. Below the senatorial order the wider social elite was joined in the so-called equestrian order of which, in the past, the senators had formed the top stratum. But by the time of Augustus, there were rather clear differences between the narrow summit of the elite and its wider substrate. Unlike the senators, equestrians' public personae were not formed to a significant degree by the cultural heritage of their families and the collective past of their primary group. Equally important, the equestrian order had no organ representing its collective interests; in fact, there were no distinctive collective interests of this group at all. Membership in the equestrian order depended on wealth (400,000 sesterces) and some rather vaguely defined criteria of honor (including free birth and Roman citizenship).⁶⁵ To the emperors, the order must have seemed an ideal pool of able supporters and agents. That is not to say that emperors relied on the equestrian order to balance the power of the Senate, as was sometimes supposed in older scholarship.⁶⁶ As noted, the equestrian order as such lacked clear contours and never carried much weight politically. This was in fact one of the reasons emperors picked equestrians as their agents. They had enough wealth and "honor" to be accepted as representatives of the emperors. A solid education was supposed to be part of their social equipment (though this was never tested in some formalized way). Basically entering the emperor's service to further their individual careers and lacking the social capital to aim for the highest positions, equestrians were considered loyal only to the emperors (whereas prominent senators shared their loyalty among the emperor, their family tradition, and the collective tradition of the senatorial order). It is from this group, then, that the emperor appointed a handful of trusted agents, called mostly procurator or, especially when acting as high-ranking representatives of the emperor in Rome, prefect, to support him in duties that he either could not or would not leave to senatorial officeholders. The reasons for this "exclusion" of senators varied widely, from simple refusals by the aristocrats of posts they deemed unworthy (such as head of the fire brigades) to considerations of loyalties in very sensitive tasks (such as commander of the imperial body guard).⁶⁷

Procurationes were salaried posts from the beginning, though the payments were officially styled indemnities, as upper-class Romans abhorred the very idea

64. Peachin 2004; Eich 2008b.

65. Millar 1977.

66. Pflaum 1950.

67. Absil 1997; Sablayrolles 1996.

of a wage, considered incompatible with their status.⁶⁸ Senatorial officeholders were paid indemnities as well, but this was never the prime motivation for aristocrats to enter a public career, nor had it the same structuring effect on the members of the first order as it had on the equestrian agents, who—since the mid-first century CE—used the amount of money they received for their activities as titles to indicate their rank.⁶⁹ While there was nothing like a career in the modern sense of the word,⁷⁰ posts were more often than not held in certain successions. The procurators represented a new kind of administrator, closely related to the sphere of private business (“procurators” had long worked as representatives of rich Romans in legal or business matters).⁷¹ Equally important, they were never fully integrated in the old structural framework of the *res publica*.

Shmuel Eisenstadt once suggested that the establishment of a “system of recruitment usually not requiring membership in any kinship, local-territorial groups, but based to a greater extent on criteria of skill, wealth, achievement, or political loyalty to the rulers” was a major step towards bureaucratization.⁷² Undoubtedly, similar notions have caused some scholars especially in the first half of the twentieth century to simply term the procuratorial service a bureaucracy.⁷³ As indicated above, I harbor strong doubts as to whether any analytical potential inheres in such a vague use of bureaucratic terminology. As we shall see, all the merits of this term lie in its connotations while it itself denotes almost nothing. A few observations may suffice to demonstrate this point.

First, the number of procurators always remained rather small. Augustus was slow to implement the administrative structures just mentioned; in the beginning, he not only at times employed freedmen instead of equestrians as procurators in the provinces but made use of various other solutions as well.⁷⁴ Only 35 procuratorships seem to have existed under the first *princeps*, a number raised to roughly 110 in the mid-second century and 180 in the third century when the curve reached a peak.⁷⁵ There is no ideal number of agents that must be reached before an administration may be considered a bureaucracy. But 35 is certainly a low number that calls for some explanatory remarks from the supporters of the thesis that Augustus established a completely new administrative regime. While this is no decisive argument, other characteristics of the new staff argue against the definition of the early procuratorial service as a bureaucratic organization. A very peculiar feature of the emperor’s staff in the first two centuries of the

68. See Pflaum 1974: 55–6. Pflaum, though, goes too far in marking out fully fledged equestrian careers. Senatorial careers were, in fact, more thoroughly formalized than those of the equestrian agents.

69. Alföldy 1981: 185 (*sexagenarii, centenarii, ducenarii, trecenarii*).

70. Pflaum 1974: 56ff.

71. Schäfer 1998.

72. Eisenstadt 1963: 21.

73. See, e.g., Stein 1927: 442; Hirschfeld 1905: 410ff.

74. On use of freedmen, see France 2001a: 373; for other solutions, see Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 1.399.

75. Vittinghoff 1990: 223.

principate was that the administrative pyramid was more or less turned on its head: the agents at the periphery (mostly provincial procurators but increasingly other procurators with financial responsibilities as well) very often had higher status or higher rank than those at the center who were at first mostly freedmen; only in the later second century was the central accountant, the so-called *a rationibus* or *rationalis* (who by then acted as the head of a *collegium* of four *rationales*) paid more than his colleagues who administered only certain parts of the sums for which the *rationales* were responsible.⁷⁶ The same holds true for the other important posts in the emperor's secretariat.⁷⁷ The equestrian prefects in Rome were exceptions, but neither the praetorian prefect (the commander of the guard) nor the *praefectus vigilum* originally had any sway over provincial agents. As status barriers were almost impossible to overcome in early imperial Rome, it seems evident that no administrative hierarchies existed at this time (the *praefectus annonae* might be an exception but we have no evidence for the subordination of procurators under this agent before the late second century).⁷⁸

Given the nature of our sources and their fragmentary state, it is almost impossible to prove that something *did not* exist at a specific point of time in Roman history. But if our literary sources from the early principate are not completely misleading, most procurators had no clear-cut sphere of competence at such an early stage, something that was to develop only over time. Clear indicators for this are the constant frictions between procurators and governors, as responsibilities seemed to have overlapped at least in practice.⁷⁹ The same holds true for the *praefectus praetorio*,⁸⁰ his jurisdiction was later rivaled by that of the urban prefect.⁸¹ The responsibilities of the *praefectus vigilum* (basically chief of the fire-fighting squads) and the *praefectus annonae* (who was in charge of the food supply of the city of Rome) were more clearly (but certainly not altogether clearly) defined, but they still must have encountered some interference from other urban agents.⁸² We have only very few bits of evidence for the files of the government and its various departments. The army files must have been quite comprehensive, as were the archives for census material of all kinds.⁸³ These attainments were noted above. Whether internal communication between administrators was typically composed and recorded in writing is quite a different matter. If our literary sources are reliable, interaction between administrators in Rome was largely oral (no communiqués, memoranda, etc. are on record). In the official exchange between emperors and officeholders in the provinces, the “back-

76. *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 8854 = *Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae* 424.

77. Pflaum 1974: 15ff.

78. Eich 2005: 189ff.

79. Eich 2005: 106ff.

80. Ensslin, *Realencyclopädie* 22.2: 2391–502 (s.v. “Praefectus Praetorio”).

81. Camodeca 1976: 95; Millar 1977: 124.

82. Sablayrolles 1996: 96–7, 100ff.; Eich 2005: 191.

83. Nicolet 1991a; Speidel 2007.

ground of private social and literary correspondence” is still clearly visible.⁸⁴ Our sources offer no clue that the central agents of the emperor’s staff were supposed to communicate with officials operating in the periphery, independently from the emperor. To judge from the best-known case, Pliny’s exchange of letters with the emperor Trajan, communication was not formalized to a high degree.⁸⁵ The archives of governors were slow to develop.⁸⁶ But Pliny preferred to send copies of imperial texts back to Rome instead of simply referring to copies or original documents in the central archives.⁸⁷ Evidence in the legal literature for administrative systematization belongs almost exclusively to later periods. All of this taken together still does not prove a low standard of recording administrative acts (especially internal communication as opposed to, say, census documents). But this is what our albeit rather limited information indicates. New discoveries of significant inscriptions may change the picture, but I doubt this.

There are few signs, then, that the early imperial staff was “bureaucratic” at least as to its structural framework and functional mechanisms (to say nothing about its basis of legitimacy, the norm orientation of the administrators, or the level of technical knowledge involved in its activities). Still, the characterization of the procurators and equestrian prefects as a “bureaucracy” was not simply wrong. Apart from stressing the fact that these equestrian appointees were a new type of agent (matching some of the criteria for bureaucrats developed by Eisenstadt in the quotation given above), there are other associations behind this use of the bureaucratic terminology that will I try to make explicit in the analysis that follows.

The procurators taken together were a motley group whose tasks seemed to have almost nothing in common. These posts included the top administrator of the imperial libraries as well as the superintendent of the large barracks for gladiators.⁸⁸ But from the beginning it was clear that their main field of activity was the financial administration. As time went on, the priorities of the emperor’s staff became even more marked, as more and more posts were created by splitting up the provincial *procuraciones*, whose responsibilities were originally quite encompassing.⁸⁹ Their single most important task was noted above: in the provinces of the emperor, if garrisoned, they supplied the army (especially with certain staples) and they paid the troops.⁹⁰ Second, they supervised the raising of taxes in money and in kind; the bulk of these revenues was used specifically to pay for the requirements of the army. As the duties of the provincial procurators were gradually split up, more and more procurators were employed with the responsibility

84. Millar 1977: 215.

85. Eich 2004.

86. Haensch 1992.

87. Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.57–58. See also Eich 2005: 295; Meyer-Zwiffelhofer 2002: 269.

88. Eck 2000: 242ff.

89. Brunt 1990: 167; Burton 1993: 18–9.

90. See note 60.

for taxes that were due only on specific occasions (as the inheritance tax or a wide variety of customs duties), or for other special tasks (e.g., the administration of mines).⁹¹ Tax collection was handled by the cities, the villages, or the tribes themselves and the customs duties, the manumission tax, and so on were often farmed out to private companies of varying sizes;⁹² the procurators were usually employed only for monitoring this process. In all their tasks, the equestrian procurators were supported by a staff consisting of imperial slaves and freedmen, often backed up by soldiers.⁹³ A number of inscriptions related to estate management in North Africa suggest that single administrative units under a procurator may have prefigured the later bureaucratic development;⁹⁴ but we know next to nothing about how the tax administration operated.⁹⁵ The individual administrative units do not seem to have been interconnected except by the person of the emperor himself; the process of levying taxes (etc.) in the principate is generally considered a haphazard one.⁹⁶

Besides, procurators in all provinces were responsible for the administration of the emperor's private properties as well as those of the *res publica* which were, at least by the early third century, treated similarly.⁹⁷ Imperial estates at least in some regions like North Africa were export oriented;⁹⁸ the cereal surpluses they produced were at least partly used to supply army units; as important, the huge demands of the capital had to be met.⁹⁹ The task of organizing the transport of wheat and, later, other staple goods that were distributed¹⁰⁰ among the citizens fell to the prefect of the *annona*, one of the high-ranking equestrian prefects, whose responsibilities closely resembled those of the procurators in that he dealt with resources vital to the emperors. Basically, then, the procuratorial system was responsible for the levying of resources destined to supply the most important political pillars of the emperor: the army and the population of the capital. At the same time, the army was the most important instrument in guaranteeing the constant flow of resources to the center. As I will discuss presently, it was in a sense natural for European scholars to associate an administration such as the procuratorial system with the concept of a bureaucracy. But if we are not completely misled by our sources, the emperors' staff in the first two hundred years of the principate was not only tiny in the number of agents working on a contract basis (for "indemnities"),

91. See note 89.

92. For the role of private entrepreneurs, see Aubert 2003.

93. Boulvert 1970; Crawford 1976; Hirschfeld 1905: 134, 160; Nelis-Clément 2000: 244ff.; Haensch 2006.

94. Hirschfeld 1905: 139ff.; Nicolet 1991b.

95. See the excellent study of France 2001b, with whose hypotheses or conclusions, though, I am not always in agreement.

96. See Eck 1979; Neesen 1980.

97. Hirschfeld 1905: 139ff.

98. Kehoe 1988.

99. Höbenreich 1997; Lo Cascio 2007.

100. This was only the core activity of the *cura annonae*. It is not entirely clear how deeply the prefect of the *annona* was involved with the provisioning of the city in normal times. See Sirks 2006.

it also almost completely lacked the structural framework to act as an organization; in fact, each agent supported the emperor individually, as it were, in a more or less clearly circumscribed activity. The reason for this arrangement was certainly not only to minimize costs. The aristocratic heritage of the Republic endorsed by Augustus, whether from personal leanings or because of the weight of tradition or a combination of both, probably bogged down further administrative development for a long time to come. Equally significant, the construction chosen enabled the emperors to act as often as possible as deciders in critical or simply problematic situations, thereby stabilizing their position that with each determination was proved indispensable.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, it was under Augustus, when the decision to maintain a rather large standing army was taken, that the groundwork for a new type of administration was laid.

At this stage of the analysis, it becomes necessary to qualify what was said before about the construction of the Roman administration and the emperors' staff. If for the sake of convenience we define the principate as the span of time between the inauguration of the new system by Augustus and the sole reign of Constantine, there is indeed evidence for the existence of spheres of responsibility, tentatively defined by abstract rules, hierarchies depending on such specified spheres of competence, and a better recording of the internal operations of the administration. A few inscriptions and papyri and some passing remarks in the historiographical tradition suggest the existence of such functional principles of a historical bureaucracy, evidence that is corroborated by rather more frequent but unfortunately often enigmatic indications in the juridical literature.¹⁰²

Modern approaches to these few pieces of evidence have differed markedly. A majority of scholars, convinced that the administration of the principate was completely unbureaucratic, choose to ignore them.¹⁰³ If they deal at all with such sources as I have mentioned, they marginalize them.¹⁰⁴ Scholars who freely use the term "bureaucracy" to characterize the Roman government cite them as evidence that the Roman administration was bureaucratic from the start.¹⁰⁵ (Usually, though, this camp fails to concretize such statements by citing specific pieces of evidence.) Given the fragmentary state of our evidence, none of these positions can simply be discarded. Nevertheless, in what follows, I will propose a different scenario. When we chart the data discussed here on a time axis, it is noticeable that all relevant pieces of information fall into a very interesting

101. Millar 1990.

102. *L'Année Epigraphique* 1908: 233, 1942–3: 105, 1973: 126; *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 1403, 9017, and 9018; *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3.14165; 6.1585b, 9.2438; *Inscriptions Latines d'Algérie* 1.875, 2.275; *Orientis Graecae Inscriptiones Selectae* 519; Dio Cassius 52.24.4; Eusebius, *Church History* 9.1.3ff., 9.9a.1ff.; Herodian 4.12.7–8; Lydus, *On the Magistracies* 1.14, 2.13, and 2.6 with Eich 2005: 231; Parsons 1967, plus Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 42.3046–50; Justinianic Code 1.26.2, 9.2.6, and 10.42.10; Pseudo-Paul, *Opinions* 5.17.11; also Eich 2005: 350ff. on the institutionalization of a new type of governor in the third century.

103. See my discussion in Eich 2008a.

104. Millar 1986; Virlouvet 2004.

105. Kaser and Hackl 1996: 536; Laffi 2001.

period of Roman history. The first points can be plotted in the time of Marcus Aurelius; the picture gets clearer and more reliable in the time of the Severans. Further evidence can be found in the following years up to the mid-third century, when so far as reliable sources are concerned, we enter what Arnold Jones has called a “dark tunnel.”¹⁰⁶ When at the start of the fourth century we are on solid open ground again, there is mounting evidence that the administration had been thoroughly rebuilt. Most scholars agree that the governmental organs of the fourth century differ from those of the early principate, though the character of the restructured administration is still disputed.¹⁰⁷

What makes this distribution of the relevant sources telling is that it follows the general trajectory of the Roman Empire in one crucial aspect—the imperial need for war-related resources. To pay and supply the legions regularly never had been easy, as was said above.¹⁰⁸ But as long as the empire was on the offensive, it seems that it could well sustain the standing army Augustus had introduced. In the first two hundred years of the principate, the emperor and his advisers could usually more or less determine the time and place of wars so that troops could be massed at frontiers according to a prearranged schedule. As a result, the peaceful intervals between wars usually were long enough to allow for a replenishment of the various central and provincial coffers of the empire. Loot and territorial gains could even result in substantial surpluses. But the post-Trajanic army of the second century already must have been a huge burden on the empire. From the time of Marcus Aurelius on, the empire slowly lost the vital advantage of being able to dictate the operating schedule. In the third century perpetual border wars harassed the Rhine, the Danube, and often the Euphrates regions. The founder of the dynasty of the Severans fought his way to the throne by long and bloody civil wars that afterward became endemic in the political system of the empire. Marcus and Septimius Severus raised five new legions as well as further troops.¹⁰⁹ Military pay was significantly raised by Severus, Caracalla, and Maximinus.¹¹⁰ Later emperors probably added further units to the roster,¹¹¹ most likely handing out additional money to the troops at least at times as well, but we cannot check this because of the lack of reliable sources.¹¹²

It seems impossible to deny that an empire that was involved in almost constant wars and that often lost at least battles (if not wars, for which subsidies had to be paid) was in dire need of war-related resources. The imperial coinage began

106. Jones 1964: 23.

107. See Eich 2011.

108. See note 60.

109. E. Birley 1969 and A. Birley 1993: 142.

110. Herodian 3.8.4–5., 4.4.7, and 6.8.8; Dio Cassius 78.36.3–4 (Boissovain, 3rd ed.: 444); *Historia Augusta, Life of Severus* 12.2.

111. Nicasie 1998.

112. Eich 2005: 362ff.

to mirror the strain¹¹³ on the imperial financial system in the late second century.¹¹⁴ In the third century, the proportion of silver in the main imperial coins became less and less, but prices seem to have remained basically stable.¹¹⁵ We must remember, though, that the inhabitants of the empire were by law obliged to accept the debased imperial coinage.¹¹⁶ Only at the time of Aurelian, when an imperial reform (whose aims and results are still heatedly discussed) further worsened the imbalance between the official and the real value of imperial coins, did prices rise steeply; from that time, inflation became a recurrent problem of the empire in political as well as economic terms.¹¹⁷

Reliable information about tax rates in the Roman Empire is extremely scarce.¹¹⁸ This is why almost every scholar interprets the facts according to her or his basic orientation. Rome extracted different amounts in different regions, so that generalizations tend to be very abstract in nature. If combined, the evidence points to tax rates similar to those of preindustrialization states in Europe, though somewhat at the lower end of the scale.¹¹⁹ The tax structure could therefore be considered inefficient (though given the nature of the imperial economic and political structures, I very much doubt the accuracy of this description).¹²⁰ But from the point of view of the average non-Roman inhabitant of the empire, the amount of resources extracted from the empire under various titles was certainly not low. Provincials rebelled against the Roman tax regime fairly often and violence against people unable (or unwilling) to pay was hardly an exception.¹²¹ Elites were certainly able to shift burdens, legally or illegally, onto people less well placed to avoid such deteriorations of their situation.¹²² The Roman tax structure cannot simply be compared to tax regimes of the twentieth century. We do not

113. See Bost 2000 for a thorough study of the relationship between coinage and wars in the first half of the third century.

114. See Lo Cascio 1984: 144.

115. Carrié and Rousselle 1999: 127ff. In part, the debasement seems also to have resulted from a shortage of bullion: see Depeyrot and Hollard 1987.

116. Hasler 1980: 62ff.

117. Carrié and Rousselle 1999.

118. Neesen 1980; Brunt 1981.

119. Duncan-Jones 1994: 34; Potter 1990: 6ff., 64ff.; Lo Cascio 2006 and 2007; Scheidel and Friesen 2009. See also Scheidel in this volume, chapter 5. One reason for the general feeling in antiquity that tax rates were quite high was very likely the inequities of the system. Questions of fairness almost always shape the perception of tax structures: see, e.g., Hoffman and Rosenthal 1997: 33–4.

120. See Bang 2002.

121. MacMullen 1987.

122. In Italia, for example, citizens did not have to pay taxes on land or the poll tax, but only taxes not regularly levied, such as the inheritance tax or customs duties. Elites with direct access to the emperor could try to reap various privileges such as the *ius trium liberorum* or similar favors that could easily be capitalized on. Provincial elites were certainly better off when they were Roman citizens or, later, *honestiores*. Whole communities were sometimes awarded the *ius italicum* so that landed property would go untaxed. Illegal forms of avoiding duties of all kinds seem to have been quite common. See *Fontes Iuris Romani Anteiusustiniani* 1² 103 (concerning the *saltus Burunitanus*), the imperial laws against abuses of public services by private persons (e.g., Herrmann 1990), or the enormous tax rebates that certainly mostly favored the rich (see, e.g., Dio Cassius 69.8.1; Oliver 1989: 88 = *Sammelbuch* 3.1.6944; Dio Cassius 72.32.2 [Xiphilinos]).

know how much more could have been extracted from the empire without endangering a precarious social and political balance.

But in the third century, emperors were certainly in need of additional funds to stabilize their individual regime as well as the empire, which was enduring a constant string of wars; in the second half of the century, the danger of collapse became real. There are some signs that tax rates indeed went up in the third century.¹²³ Otherwise, the power elites tried to cope with the situation by constantly reducing the weight and silver content of the imperial coinage. The effects of this policy of debasement in fact came close to raising the tax rates.¹²⁴ Since the wars of the Severan age, a new type of contribution was demanded of provincials in order to supply armies on the move: the *annona*. Originally organized as a compulsory purchase, the *annona* was later not always recompensed and was certainly burdensome on the provincials.¹²⁵ We lack data to discuss how the tax structure developed in the second half of the third century, but given the circumstances we should allow for tax increases or additional levies (whether efficient or not).¹²⁶ Inflation, though, would later have taken its toll on the hypothetical gains.¹²⁷ But it is necessary to keep in mind that the strains on the provincial population would have differed widely between war zones—where people must have felt the effects of special levies, the *annona*, the debasement of coins issued by mobile mints, the billeting of armies, and the devastation caused by enemy attacks much more keenly—and peaceful areas of the empire, especially in North Africa or parts of the Near East. I am not arguing that there was a general crisis of all aspects of public and private life throughout the third century.¹²⁸ But there certainly were regions that suffered a decline from the late second¹²⁹ or at least the early third century, a process culminating in the traumatic period between 260 and 290 CE.¹³⁰

It is against this background that we should interpret the evidence for a process of “bureaucratization” among the emperor’s staff from the late second century. After that time, the emperors must have felt the strains on the financial system caused by long and difficult wars as well as other factors such as the great plague in the time of the Antonines (as well as later plagues). They will have felt the need to organize the accumulation of resources more effectively and to improve the monitoring capacity of the center. A first move to achieve this aim was

123. Eich 2005: 366ff.

124. Carrié and Rousselle 1999: 579.

125. Mitthof 2001: 51 n. 55.

126. Witschel 1999: 178ff.

127. Lo Cascio 2007.

128. The overarching model of a “crisis of empire” has been under attack for over a decade now: see Witschel 1999; Johnes, Gerhardt, and Hartmann 2006. But see now Hekster, De Kleijn, and Slootjes 2007.

129. The Antonine Plague certainly spelled havoc in some regions: see Lo Cascio 2007. But there seem to have been other, not war-related factors at work in the late-second-century downturn in some regions as well: see Haas 2006.

130. Duncan-Jones 2004; Jongman 2007: 611–2.

to improve the organizational framework of their personal staff, that is, the “equestrian administration.” The first indications for such a rebuilding can be found under Marcus Aurelius, but the most significant changes of the operational framework and the functional principles of the staff were probably made under the Severans. This hypothesis is supported by information from the Digest and the Justinian Code: the famous jurists of the time, who worked more closely with the government and, even more importantly, inside the government than jurists had ever done before, labored continuously to systematize all kinds of administrative acts.¹³¹ The spheres of competence of the various officeholders were defined by a system of abstract rules (which was certainly not comprehensive, however).¹³² The role of the emperor as a judge of appeal was strengthened; at the same time, the subordination of the governors to the center was reinforced by the emperors’ expanded use of the instrument of the *rescriptum*.¹³³ In implementing these strategies, the emperors relied on the advice and the technical expertise of their jurists, who filled various important posts in the emperors’ staff and were present in the imperial council.¹³⁴ But here a caveat is in order. Reliable information is available for only a handful of very prominent jurists.¹³⁵ While there will have been more jurists around, at no time did the emperors establish a fixed set of criteria that a candidate had to match before he could enter the staff or at least rise above the junior ranks.¹³⁶ On the other hand, we should not assume that only the most prominent jurists actually had some prior juridical knowledge. Study of this academic branch was probably gradually becoming more common, but the process was a very slow one that gained speed only in the second half of the fourth century.

After the Severans, the empire’s overall condition deteriorated. There were no more dynasties, and emperors reigned for only a short span of time, almost all meeting a violent death in war or civil war, or by plain murder.¹³⁷ But the restructured imperial staff stabilized and eventually started to encroach on the domain of the senatorial officeholders who still dominated the provincial administration.¹³⁸ The provincial administration in itself eventually became more structured, as an additional level of office-holders between emperors and governors

131. For all of this, see the most important work on the subject and the imperial role in it: Coriat 1997. For first indications, see *L’Année Epigraphique* 1908: 233; *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 1403; *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 9.2438; for the Severans, see *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.1585b; *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 9017; *L’Année Epigraphique* 1942–3: 105; *Inscriptions Latines d’Algérie* 1.875; 2.285; *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3.14165; Dio Cassius 52.24.4.

132. See esp. Spagnuolo Vigorita 1978a and 1978b; Wieacker 1960: 389; Gualandi 1963. This process had started in the late second century.

133. Coriat 1985.

134. Coriat 1990.

135. Eich 2005: 221ff., 374ff.

136. Peachin 1996.

137. Hartmann 1982.

138. See, e.g., Pflaum 1960: 811ff., no. 317.

was slowly and unsystematically put in place.¹³⁹ But only at the height of what even scholars skeptical of the concept are prepared to call the crisis of empire did the drive to establish some sort of historical bureaucracy finally have a breakthrough. From the 260s on, more and more governors came from the equestrian order.¹⁴⁰ No ancient author¹⁴¹ gives any insight into this administrative transformation that effectively ended senatorial service in the army and as governors. But the only plausible explanation I can imagine is that the new type of governors could finally be subordinated to the central agents of the imperial staff. This is almost certainly true for the praetorian prefects who by then had become the linchpins of the imperial staff, coordinating its actions and protecting its interests if they had to be backed up by armed force.¹⁴² Probably the *rationales* became the superiors of the new type of governors as well, as they had been of the traditional procurators in the third century.¹⁴³ For almost half a century, the traditional aristocracy was barred from almost all meaningful posts in the Roman administration (at least outside Italy and the proconsular provinces of Africa and Asia, which were, however, vastly reduced in size), a trend to be revised only by the charismatic emperor Constantine, whose rationale for his decision is still energetically debated.¹⁴⁴ From the second half of the third century, then, the provincial administration of the empire seems to have been organized hierarchically, a structure based on the respective competence of the agents involved. There are indications, too, that administrative acts, including internal operations, were recorded more systematically,¹⁴⁵ and jurists tried to define even the huge sphere of responsibility of the praetorian prefects more clearly along functional lines.¹⁴⁶ Equally important, the ground rules of administrative work in the provinces changed gradually in the second half of the third century, though we are quite unable to date any single step in this process precisely. Maybe initiated by Gallienus, the two types of surrogates for civil administrators—soldiers delegated by their units to support the governors and imperial slaves and freedmen—were slowly replaced by freeborn, professional civil agents, who were only nominally members of the army, even though the military organization of the administration was retained.¹⁴⁷ When this process was completed, for the first time in history

139. Peachin 1996; Eich 2005: 359ff.; Vervaeke 2007.

140. Christol 1982.

141. Aurelius Victor, *On the Caesars* 37.7 (Cf. 37.5–6) deals with the question, but offers only stereotypical polemics.

142. See Chastagnol 1992: 210; Eich 2005: 230ff., 350ff.

143. Eich 2005: 168ff., 175ff.

144. See Eich forthcoming.

145. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 9.2438, 3.14165⁸, 6.1585b; Eusebius, *Church History* 9.1.3ff., 9.9a.1ff.; Clausen 1980 (for the tasks of the *magister officiorum*); Coles 1966: 24. The sources, however, offer only anecdotal evidence. Systematic evidence for a change in the recording practice of the administration can only be found in late Roman times. See note 149.

146. Grelle 1987.

147. Pflaum 1950: 317ff.; Chastagnol 1988: 202–3; Carrié 1998: 21; Haensch 2006. The whole process may well have started later, maybe as late as under Diocletian: see de Blois 2006.

Rome had a substantial professional corps of civil administrators who were neither barred from any real advancement by ascriptive criteria nor permanent stopgaps, as the detached soldiers had been. This was a real revolution. We cannot quantify the motley group of administrators employed by the center before this change, but very likely the revamped provincial administration was substantially larger than its predecessor. I will return to these questions shortly.

At the end of the third century, then, there was a significant acceleration in the metamorphosis of the Roman administration that very probably affected the society at large as well. The most obvious result of this change was a general hierarchization of the administration. Because of a clearer definition of the competences of each level of the administration, the agents at the periphery were now subordinated to the center, which was in itself hierarchically organized.¹⁴⁸ Monitoring had become much more intense: in the early fourth century, governors were supposed to send their records to the central agents for auditing at least two, sometimes three, times a year.¹⁴⁹ The structural framework of the administration was more tightly knit, much more homogeneous, and probably larger.

This whole change was not simply initiated by the personal choices of one or more emperors who wanted to secure their position in a given political configuration.¹⁵⁰ In the model presented above, it was stimulated by the pressing need of the empire to cope with its military problems, as its overall strategic trajectory deteriorated slowly after the late second century because of external wars and internal strife. As emperors and their advisers were struggling to extract the necessary but scarce resources, the emperor's staff was reorganized so that it could deal with this task more effectively. We lack the data to judge whether this plan proved successful, but at least the empire survived. I assume a close interrelationship, then, between the needs of the standing army, problems with vital resources (money, food, recruits, a stable political environment), and the process of bureaucratization or, perhaps better, protobureaucratization. If this analysis of the empire is fairly accurate, its development was far from singular. Chinese bureaucratization in the Warring States period and, especially, in the Qin period, was of course driven by war.¹⁵¹ But there are clear differences between the Chinese and the Roman experience, as will become clearer below. The changes in Roman society and administration come closer to a different historical example that has actually achieved a paradigmatic character: in almost all studies, the

148. Corcoran 2000: 138, no. 43 (cf. no. 202); Grelle 1993; Delmaire 1989; Millar 1980.

149. Jones 1964: 575–6; cf. Delmaire 1995: 71–2; Giardina and Grelle 1983.

150. This is a popular, but implausible, suggestion: see the earlier scholarship on the emperor Claudius, or Giangrieco Pessi 1988 on the Severans. The whole process of “bureaucratization” seems to have been continuous (though there were certainly lulls at times as much as accelerations). Nor does it seem likely that emperors built up their staffs simply to check the power of the Senate. While at times emperors had to rely heavily on their staffs against potential rivals, the decisive breakthrough in the process of protobureaucratization came at a time when the Senate as an institutional organ was hardly a dominant factor any more: see Eich 2008b.

151. Kiser and Cai 2003; Lewis 2007: 30ff.

tertium comparationis has been European bureaucratization since the late Middle Ages.¹⁵² Bureaucratization was a major part of the European state-building process and has been studied quite intensively. Though differences can easily be found in every (successful or failed) state in the making, certain patterns have been detected in the process of bureaucratization that appear to be almost ubiquitous. The process was stimulated by wars; elites inside “states” as well whole “states” competed to extract a maximum of resources necessary for war and internal as well as external rivalry. From a certain point (differing from society to society), expanding standing armies were a major component of this constellation: they could not only be brought into action in battle zones but could also be used to back up the power elites’ demands for further contributions in cases where a consensus could not be reached. Modern bureaucracy has its seeds in the administrations put in place to sustain and supply armies and especially standing professional armies (as opposed to the huge armies of conscript peasants in the Chinese case before the Eastern Han period).¹⁵³ It was at the focal points of this system, tax collection and army supply, that new and “efficient” administrative structures, designed to operate independently of traditional forms of administration, were introduced. This interrelationship between expanding professional armies and the development of “state” power has been dubbed the “extraction-coercion cycle”: more resources enabled power elites to create or employ larger armies, which could then be used to extract even more resources; the new-style administrations were the most important spin-offs of this cycle.¹⁵⁴

This, of course, is only a rough sketch, but as an abstract model, this brief description is pretty accurate. There are obvious similarities between the development of the Roman Empire and this outline of the rise of historical bureaucracies in Europe. No doubt there are obvious differences as well. Already under the first *princeps*, there was a standing army of some three hundred thousand men, whose existence was not contested (after twenty years of bloodshed, civil wars, and proscriptions, opposition would not have seemed opportune). The empire had reliable tax structures as well; it did not have to start from scratch. The breadth of the extraction-coercion cycle in early modern times was certainly much wider. But there was such a cycle in the empire, too, as the material cited above indicates. Very probably, then, the new Roman administration of the third and following

152. See Hui 2005 on early Chinese bureaucratization as compared to the European development. Hui focuses on the question of balance and imbalance between rival states, a political constellation alien to the Roman experience; see Veyne 1980.

153. The army of the Eastern Han period was more like the Roman military of the empire, though the reliance on convicted criminals cannot have been particularly efficacious: for all related questions, see Lewis 2000a. Perhaps it would be more useful to compare the Western Han Elite troops to Roman *comitatenses*. See Lewis 2000a: 35ff. But consider the enormous differences between the numbers of horsemen deployed: see Graff 2002: 29. On conscript armies in the Warring States period and later, see Yates 2007.

154. See, e.g., Tilly 1975; Reinhard 1992; Antoine 1982; Mousnier 1980; Kunisch 1999: 82.

centuries was genetically similar to early modern historical bureaucracies in that it, too, was clustered around a standing army.

This section aimed to show that there was some sort of bureaucratization process going on during the principate. The groundwork had been laid under Augustus; but at that early stage only a few rudimentary structures of such an administration took form. Only in the third century when the empire was fighting almost continuous wars, often on more than one front at a time, were these basic structures slowly built up and systematically linked to deal with the pressing needs of the army more effectively. One may call the new administration a bureaucracy, as its functional principles resemble other premodern bureaucracies (including the Han administration, as will be discussed below). But it is necessary to stress that there were major differences between the Roman and modern bureaucratic models. Roman administration certainly does not meet the criteria developed by Weber in his ideal type of legal authority based on a bureaucratic corps. Some of the differences are purely technical in nature, as illustrated by the monitoring problems of the Roman central administration, shared in fact by all administrations before the nineteenth or even the twentieth century. But other differences are even more fundamental. Weber defined bureaucracy as the very prototype of rational rule. In fact, rational and bureaucratic are at times synonymous in his work.¹⁵⁵ His conceptualizations have been criticized as being emblematic of all the misunderstandings of classical organizational theory.¹⁵⁶ As was observed above, the criticisms have been at times at least as schematic as Weber was presumed to be.¹⁵⁷ I cannot and do not want to enter this minefield and will stick here to some basic comments. In all historical societies, there existed a typology of rationalities that influenced or dictated behavior and action, a fact Weber was well aware of. We should certainly try to avoid the idea of any kind of teleology in dealing with bureaucratization processes. Still, the single most important component of the ideal type of bureaucratic rule is that administrative acts are based on a consistent system of rules and norms that aim at complete impersonality of the decision-making process. While in reality a completely impersonal order has proved elusive, the ideal may still help us to categorize administrative organizations. The Roman administration surely never came close to this ideal; in fact, impersonality was never an aim of Roman power elites. Status always remained an accepted stratifying principle in Rome. The Roman bureaucracy that developed in the third century did not orient its actions to any abstract rules as its ultimate guidelines. It was always an instrument designed and used to help a particular emperor govern (even if it failed to protect particular emperors). Agents were guided by abstract rules in their dealings with

155. Sica 2000: 49ff.

156. Mortara 1973: 21ff.; Cohen and Britan 1980: 10–1.

157. See notes 11–13.

particular problems or when they tried to mark off (in fact rather flexible) boundaries between their spheres of responsibility and that of other administrators. But the single most important factor in the order governing the administrators at all times was the emperor's will, the imperatives of which were by no means limited by any abstract rules. A concept developed of an overarching new political order, a political system no longer simply identical with any person or any primary group (*utilitas publica* was the Latin term); I will discuss this later in more detail. But this ideal never balanced the importance of the emperor's person as the linchpin of the whole governmental system. Roman administration, then, was some sort of protobureaucracy, a highly personalized administration, clustered around a standing army, trying to extract and distribute the resources this army needed while preserving the more or less (tradition of course acted as a check) unrestricted position of the ruler. I propose calling such a system a personal or personalized bureaucracy.

The particular model described above is not based on Weber's analysis. Weber did not explicate how rudimentary patrimonial administration developed into more complex patrimonial bureaucracies. He merely remarked that this could happen with increasing functional division and rationalization, but did not explain under which circumstances this would typically happen (though, of course, he stresses the impact of capitalism on such a process).¹⁵⁸ But as his whole sociological theory was very much focused on war, he may be considered one of the forebears of the approach outlined above. The analytical potential of Weber in this respect has been stressed lately by a group of scholars who combine a Weberian approach with various later, often economic models such as (some form of) agency theory.¹⁵⁹ Though I do not share all the assumptions and conclusions of this school of "analytical Weberianism," there obviously is common ground. As this school has offered a stringent though certainly not generally accepted analysis¹⁶⁰ of early Chinese bureaucratization, too, further studies along this line may help to detect additional convergences in the development of the respective organizational frameworks of the Roman and Chinese Empires, though, needless to say, such converging lines certainly remain embedded in differing contextual structures.

3. EGYPT

When Augustus took the helm of the *res publica* in 27 BCE, there was no bureaucracy to help him rule the empire. As I tried to show in the preceding section, this situation did not change over the next 200 or even 250 years, when some sort of historical bureaucracy finally came into being. Before dealing with the practice

158. Weber 1978: 1028ff.

159. Kiser and Baer 2005.

160. Kiser and Cai 2003.

of the Roman “personal” bureaucracy in its developed form (fourth–fifth centuries CE), we should look at an existing bureaucracy within the Roman Empire, not, however, a Roman bureaucracy in the true sense of the word: the special case of Egypt.

That Egypt was a special province has been claimed for a long time, though few scholars have cared to explain their view. After more than two decades of publications of a revisionist color on the subject, such an approach is no longer viable. But Egypt certainly was special if only for one reason: the fact that mostly in the hot and dry regions to the south of the Nile Delta thousands of papyri were conserved means that we have more primary sources from this province than from any other part of the empire; unfortunately we have only very few papyri from the administrative center of the province, the city of Alexandria. This distribution of the documents makes almost every study of the administrative system guesswork. Still, papyri offer unique insight into the economic life, the social fabric, and the legal system of Egypt. What we do not know in many cases is whether the insights only are unique or the phenomena as well. Taking the latter view (i.e., that Egypt was unique), modern study of the Roman Empire put aside as inapplicable an enormous amount of material. Papyrology, as a result, has been treated like an orchid, as a beautiful but rather less than useful branch of science. While such an exclusive view has by now been proved wrong by almost every detailed study on social or legal issues, Egypt can hardly be taken as a role-model province for the whole empire. In what follows, I will consider only administrative differences between the Nile valley and more typical Mediterranean regions prior to the Severan reforms, which cannot be discussed here.

Questions about the legal status and the administration of Egypt have been bedeviled by the idea prevalent until the nineteenth century that Augustus in that region not only was the heir of the Ptolemaic kings and, as it were, the pharaohs but took over Egypt as a personal property, leaving more or less every structure and arrangement of the former rulers in place.¹⁶¹ This view is incompatible with the sources, as has by now been shown beyond doubt.¹⁶² After Octavian had conquered the Nile valley in 30 BCE, Egypt became a Roman province, governed by a Roman governor, garrisoned by Roman troops, and subject to directions given by the Roman Senate as well as the emperor.¹⁶³ After the normalcy of Egypt in respect to public law had been demonstrated, the pendulum of modern characterization swung sharply in the other direction: in some studies, Egypt turned from outsider to paradigm province, supposedly well suited to exemplify general trends in the empire.¹⁶⁴ As happens quite often when momentum

161. See, e.g., Mommsen 1963: 859, 953; Rostovtzeff 1927: 188; Pietschmann, *Realencyclopädie* 1.1: 1893, 978–1005, 1003 (s.v. “Agyptos”).

162. Geraci 1983: 129; Bowman 1996.

163. See the senatorial decrees incorporated in the *gnomon* of the *idios logos*: Méléze-Modrzejewski 1990.

164. See most notably Rathbone 1993; Bowman and Rathbone 1992; Drecoll 1997: 75–6, 267ff., and 354.

changes, this explanation drifted too far in the opposite direction. Lacking a distinct policy of how to rule a province and shying away, as noted above, from building up a provincial administration other than that provided by the army, Roman power elites usually took over as many administrative structures of the conquered regime as possible. That does not mean that there were no adaptations, changes on the macrolevel as well as brutal interventions in the micro-foundations of preexisting political systems. But overall, regions such as, say, Sicily, Judaea, or Achaia did not experience a radical makeover of their institutional substrate when Roman rule began. Neither did Egypt. But in Egypt, the Roman conquerors met a political system that is described as special by every ancient observer who dealt with it.¹⁶⁵ Egypt had been a highly centralized monarchy for a long time when Rome finally took power, and its elites had certainly established some sort of bureaucracy to extract a maximum of resources from the rich Nile valley, which in Hellenistic times had rivaled the much larger Asian kingdom of the Seleucids, less able to accumulate its scarce resources.¹⁶⁶ As was to be expected, Octavian/Augustus did not simply keep the Ptolemaic administrative apparatus in place; important changes had to be made, as the formerly independent kingdom lost its traditional military structure and became subordinated to a far-away ruler interested almost exclusively in the country's prime resource: grain. But what the new ruler did not change was the overall administrative practice. The Ptolemaic bureaucracy had been basically (though increasingly less so) effective in extracting resources, even if time and money certainly had to be invested by the conqueror to overhaul the water regime.¹⁶⁷ The main differences between Egypt and other Mediterranean regions were twofold. For one, economic life was completely dependent on the River Nile and the irrigation system. We will return to this phenomenon shortly. The second difference relates to the basic construction of communitarian life. Huge parts of the Roman Empire were only very thinly populated. In such regions, Roman presence must have been basically symbolic. In other parts, such as the Danube provinces, the army as well as Italian immigrants (as, for example, veterans) created a quite direct Roman presence. But the favorite Roman model for how to rule and extract resources was clearly different, as noted above: the imperial power elites always tried to cooperate with local elites in tribes, villages, or, especially, cities. Transaction costs were clearly lowest in self-governing cities of the Greek or Latin mold; cultural preference fostered this economic choice. But in Egypt, there was no tradition of self-governance, and very few Greek cities had been founded over time. Most people lived either in the big city of Alexandria (officially not part of Egypt) or in villages. Now, villages were of course a typical feature of the ancient

165. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.59.3, *Histories* 1.11.1; Dio Cassius 51.17.1; Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.5.7; Philo, *Flaccus* 3.

166. For the administrative machinery, see Manning 2003.

167. Suetonius, *Augustus* 18.2. Haensch 2008 has stressed aspects of continuity; cf. Eich 2007.

Mediterranean basin. What was different in Egypt was the high degree of central control exerted in these villages. The dominant revisionist line of thinking has claimed that Roman authority almost from the start had tried to raise the status of these villages, a process that reached its climax under Septimius Severus, whereby town councils were created in the *metropoleis* or central villages of the Egyptian administrative districts (*nomoi*).¹⁶⁸ But such an explanation presupposes a central administration consisting of formalized institutions, governed by an impersonal order and disposing of an abstract, impersonal knowledge. Only such an administration could guarantee that a long-term policy of the kind proposed was steadily implemented (in this special case allegedly over two hundred years). But such an administration did not exist in Rome, where, on the contrary, policymaking was highly personalized. Though Roman emperors shared the aristocratic values of the republican tradition and therefore favored Greek or Hellenized elites in provincial environments such as Egypt, there was no clear tendency to cut off the central control exerted by Alexandria in the villages clustered along the Nile. Rome, then, as usual, went on with the type of administration it had found when its troops arrived. In what follows, I will concentrate on three major (interrelated) differences between the Egyptian system and provincial administration in rather more typical regions, though, again, it will not be possible to present a detailed *Quellenkritik*.

When we try to characterize a political system, a key concept is that of the legitimacy of the rulers and their action in its social context.¹⁶⁹ Whether in the (post)modern world with its complex formalized institutions a majority of the people have to believe in the validity of their rulers' claims to legitimacy or whether they simply follow well-trodden paths and the patterns preset by the respective systems that govern modern life is hotly contested. But in antiquity, rule was much more personalized.¹⁷⁰ In Roman provinces the use of repressive force was always an option for the Roman power elites. But to simply count on people to follow directions by default and repress violations would probably have raised transaction costs to a very high degree. In Roman history, authority had always had the strength of tradition as its basis. In the provinces, Roman authorities tried similar techniques whenever possible. That is why Roman rulers in Egypt took over some, but certainly not all, parts of the symbolic apparatus built up over thousands of years of monarchic rule.¹⁷¹ But the characterization of the rulers' legitimacy as traditional still remains rather vague. To most other provinces, the emperor or the Senate sent a member of the Roman aristocracy, the *ordo senatorius*, which cultivated its cultural heritage and the ideal of aristocratic rule under the empire as much as under the Republic. Governors, then,

168. Bowman 1971; Bowman and Rathbone 1992.

169. But see the methodological remarks by Lendon 2006.

170. See Edelmann 2007 for a thorough discussion.

171. See the cautious discussion in Jördens 2009: 41ff.

could rely on their family's tradition (if they had a pedigree worth mentioning) as much as on the collective glory of the senatorial body to bolster their claims to legitimate authority. As the governors made use of elite interaction to implement Roman will to a significant degree, and aristocrats of different molds tended to accept each other's legitimizing discourses, this status of the governors certainly stabilized Roman rule in provinces that participated in the Greco-Roman heritage of social life. But in Egypt, Augustus picked a Roman knight as governor, with the title of prefect. We can only speculate about his motives, as the Roman historians did,¹⁷² who always pointed to security reasons for this peculiar arrangement. Egypt had been the bulwark of Octavian's last rival Antony. It certainly made sense to bar senators and their sons (the most prominent knights at this early stage of the principate) from entering a rich and, because of its past, potentially dangerous region.¹⁷³ But there must have been other reasons for this arrangement as well, as it was kept in place long after the struggle with Antony had faded from memory in day-to-day politics. The absent emperor could well fulfill the representative parts of his monarchic position via statues, letters and edicts, and various ceremonies conducted in his honor. Governors mostly acted as deciders in their provinces, giving rulings in cases that could not or should not be left to local elites. But the centralized administration of Egypt needed a good deal more continuous monitoring by the top officials than provinces that were built around a city culture. The most important task of the prefect was to audit the records of all kinds of administrators subordinate to him.¹⁷⁴ Such an activity was hardly reconcilable with the cultural heritage of the Roman aristocrats who had their private staff for this kind of work, as the emperor had his. It made sense, then, to choose the procuratorial service as the institutional framework for Roman rule in Egypt. To pick an equestrian as head of the provincial administration implied that there were no senators on a lower level, whether in the civil administration or in the army. From the start, five or six equestrian procurators worked with the prefect, and three or four more were added to the roster in the second century (not including the semimilitary personnel in charge of the quarry districts, equestrian *adiutores*, as well as the kind of procurators employed elsewhere in the empire, like the *procurator ludi familiae gladiatoriae* or the *procurator XX hereditatium* and a host of other agents about whom we do not know enough for any meaningful discussion.)¹⁷⁵ Outside Egypt, additional equestrian procurators were sometimes present alongside the provincial procurators, in charge of customs duties or, if any such existed, of huge imperial estates, but they never reached such a high number as in Egypt. I will return to the importance of this particular way of ruling the province at the end of this section; here I will go

172. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.59.3, *Histories* 1.11.1; Dio Cassius 51.17.1; Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.5.7.

173. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.59.3, *Histories* 1.11.1. See Eich 2007: 382–3.

174. Philo, *Flaccus* 16 (cf. 133).

175. Pflaum 1960: 1083ff.

on to discuss the basis of the legitimacy of the administrative personnel in the Nile valley.

Most Egyptians lived in villages and were probably not interested in the social niceties of the Roman status order. Like most people in the empire, they were more concerned with their routine life and contact with persons in the local administration. Throughout the empire, the top jobs in the various local administrative systems were assigned in different ways, according to local practice. Sometimes they were simply inherited (in tribes). In aristocratic communities elections were the instrument of choice, as the candidates could rely on their various forms of capital to secure a successful career.¹⁷⁶ Sometimes the electorate consisted only of a selected body; even more oligarchic systems could make use of co-option. In the high empire, governors increasingly had their say in the election of important local magistrates.¹⁷⁷ At all events, most communities had their own mechanism of voting for their local leadership. But in Egypt, the linchpins of the local administration were the *strategos* and the *basilikos grammateus* (royal scribe), civil administrators who controlled a whole range of lower-ranked functionaries in their administrative district, the so-called *nomos*, and its capital (technically a village), the *metropolis*.¹⁷⁸ The *strategos* certainly was an appointee of the prefect, the royal scribe very likely too.¹⁷⁹ Their authority, then, rested almost exclusively on their appointment by a Roman official, a basis of legitimacy quite different from any form of election (including co-option). The few Greek cities inside Egypt were also controlled more tightly than cities in other regions.¹⁸⁰ Although Septimius Severus finally allowed the creation of city councils in the *metropoleis*, the situation did not change fundamentally in the third century. However, in the early fourth century, the *strategos*, by now drawn from the curial class of the *civitas*, was slowly superseded by other functionaries.¹⁸¹ The authority of most administrators was certainly constructed differently in Egypt than in other provinces.

In 1975, Peter Brunt published a very influential article on the Egyptian administration.¹⁸² Brunt rejected older arguments that the prefects and procurators who had to deal with the special case of Egypt had themselves been specialists. As far as the argument goes, Brunt was correct. This result, though, hardly came as a surprise. The whole concept of a professional training of candidates for

176. Elections were practiced longer than is sometimes assumed. A new municipal law from Oescus, about to be published by Werner Eck, documents municipal elections in the time of Marcus Aurelius. For the various other forms of appointing municipal leaderships, see Jacques 1984.

177. See the discussion in Marotta 2008: 54ff. But there is no reason to assume that the local decision-making process was dominated by directions and imperatives from above. For the survival and vitality of democratic procedures in cities of Roman Asia Minor see van Nijf 2011.

178. The single most important study of the nome administration is Kruse 2002. See also Dirscherl 2002.

179. Purpura 1992: no. 12. lines 34–5; Kruse 2002: 50ff.

180. Jördens 1999.

181. Jördens 1999: 171; Bowman 1971: 116ff.

182. Brunt 1975.

public office remained alien to Rome's power elites. As in most premodern administrative systems, in-service training was how Roman generalists were supposed to acquire any special knowledge for the task at hand.¹⁸³ Other concepts of specialization discussed by historians of Roman administration have almost nothing to do with the concept of specialization as developed by the various branches of modern administrative science. It would, for instance, have been a major mistake of the Roman emperors to regularly pick members of the Greek or Hellenized elite of Egypt as heads of the various departments in Alexandria. Given the low standard of monitoring in the Roman Empire, collusion among high- and low-ranking administrators would have been almost inevitable under such circumstances.

While Rome did not bring in specialists, then, to govern Egypt, some of the posts in the Egyptian administration certainly were special. In other provinces there was nothing comparable to the *epistrategoi* who supervised the nome administration with regard to certain important but limited tasks (such as appointments to some posts in the compulsory service or, most important, in certain areas of jurisdiction).¹⁸⁴ Nor do we know of a close parallel to the procuratorship of the *idios logos* (at least before the creation of the department of the *res privata*, usually attributed to Septimius Severus).¹⁸⁵ We have only a very limited knowledge of the responsibilities of the *dioiketes*,¹⁸⁶ but, again, the documents referring to his day-to-day operations do not seem to indicate that this was an ordinary provincial procuratorship with a fanciful title. The same holds true to an even higher degree for the *archiereus*.¹⁸⁷ Now, this impression is in part certainly due to the exceptional richness of sources that Egypt presents. Some of the differences would probably disappear if we had papyri from other provinces while peculiarities of those provinces would come to light. But the impression that Egypt was untypical was shared by ancient authors, as noted above. The preserved documents and the titles of the procurators seem to indicate that we are not fully misled by this "tradition." Egyptian procuratorships were special, and the procurators were turned into specialists by in-job training, with the help of subordinates who sometimes seem to have spent long years in the same "department."¹⁸⁸ We cannot know how long an average Roman knight needed to adjust. While the tasks in Egypt were special there was nothing in them that should be considered completely remote from the experience of a typical ancient landholder. King Frederick William I of Prussia assumed that it would take a

183. Eich 2007.

184. N. Lewis 1995, 1997: 82; Thomas 1982: 111ff.; on no parallels, see Eich 2007: 389.

185. The assumption of Rathbone 1993: 110 that the *idios logos* was in fact some sort of forerunner of the typical provincial procuratorships in other provinces relies almost exclusively on arguments *e silentio*. For the date of the introduction of the *res privata*, see Millar 1977: 628ff.

186. Hagedorn 1985.

187. Rigsby 1985.

188. Philo, *Flaccus* 6–7; Brunt 1975: 140–1.

high-ranking Prussian administrator at most a year to get used to a completely different post on the highest level of an administration.¹⁸⁹ While this assumption can of course offer only a vague indication, my guess is that the king was not entirely mistaken. Prefects seem to have been on duty for some three years before 180.¹⁹⁰ If that was the standard for the other Roman procurators, the Egyptian administration with its special arrangements had some specialists in place most of the time.

But the most important difference with Egypt from other provinces consisted in its overall administrative structure. The basic elements of a protobureaucratic administration as described above can be found here. There were evidently some rather elaborate hierarchies, from the prefect down via the heads of the nome administration to the lowest level of village administration.¹⁹¹ While these channels of communication were basically built on status asymmetries, the equestrian *epistrategoi*, three or four in number in early imperial times, were subordinated to the higher-ranking equestrian procurators in the administrative headquarters in Alexandria from the start.¹⁹² This hierarchy, then, was built along functional lines. Whether the other equestrian procurators were subjected to the authority of the prefect (and did not merely have a lower rank) is more difficult to tell, as we lack sources from the administrative center. Much depends on the question of whether the phenomenon of delegated jurisdiction should be accepted as proof for a permanent subordination or not.¹⁹³ A. K. Bowman has proposed that such delegation resulted from a rather flexible handling of a scarce resource (time) in dealing with an (at times) huge workload.¹⁹⁴ That may well be true. On the other hand, our sources for the procuratorial service apart from the prefect are few and may be misleading. The *idios logos* seems to have acted independently of the prefect.¹⁹⁵ The other financial procurators are more difficult to place in the system. A clue may be suggested by the very existence of another special institution, the *eklogistai*, a rather sophisticated auditing agency in the prefect's office that seems to have handled the records and files produced by the other procurators as well.¹⁹⁶ The prefect, then, seems to have had oversight over the financial administration in his province. Whatever the truth here, there were clearly more hierarchies in Egypt than anywhere else in the procuratorial service at this early stage. Spheres of responsibilities, too, were more clearly defined, as is illustrated by the *idios logos* for which a rather long set of rules is preserved on papyrus.¹⁹⁷

189. Schellakovsky 1998.

190. Brunt 1975: 126ff.

191. See, e.g., *Papyrus Amherst* 2.68 = Wilcken, *Chrestomathie* 374; *Papyrus Amherst* 2.68 (with *Berichtigungsliste* 10.4); *Papyrus London* 3.1157 (cf. *Berichtigungsliste* 9.140).

192. Thomas 1982.

193. See my discussion in Eich 2007: 390ff.

194. Bowman 1996: 693.

195. Swarney 1970. See Kupiszewski 1953–4 for the position of the *iuridicus*.

196. Hagedorn and Maresch 1998.

197. Méléze-Modrzejewski 1990.

The fact that some responsibilities of the prefect were slowly handed over to new equestrian procurators, as in the case of the *dioiketes* or perhaps the *procurator ousiakos*, points in the same direction. The large number of high-ranking posts indicates that the administrative spectrum was certainly more differentiated in Egypt than in Rome or in any other province (though there certainly was a significant degree of overlapping of responsibilities).

The last aspect I shall discuss under this heading is the most problematic. The wealth of papyri found in Egypt certainly evokes the feeling that recording and keeping archives was much more developed in Egypt than elsewhere in the empire and that more or less all administrative acts were formulated and preserved in writing. But the lopsidedness of the amount of preserved relevant material makes it easy to be biased when estimating differences. To overcome this difficulty, we can only try to place what evidence we have into context. The rich documentation we have for the filing system in Egypt fits the whole protobureaucratic environment outlined above perfectly well.¹⁹⁸ I have discussed the institutional culture of the administrative center in the early and high principate at some length above, adding a few comments on the principles of internal communication among the imperial staff and the traditional (“senatorial”) administration. It is quite likely that in administrative communication oral discussion was preferred to writing.¹⁹⁹ Further proof for this characterization is provided by our (albeit, again, limited) knowledge of the administration of the city of Rome in imperial times. Our best source, Frontinus’s work on aqueducts (late first century CE), gives the impression that recording and oversight had hardly developed since republican times: this impression, again, corresponds to the few pieces of evidence that we have from other “departments” of the urban administration.²⁰⁰ A further point is even more important. Not only do we have some of the documents prepared by the Egyptian administration and recorded for further use, but we know by title many of the lower clerical staff in this apparatus (often working there under compulsion as part of their obligation to the “state”)²⁰¹ who seem to have produced great quantities of “paperwork” in a rather limited span of time; for example, five-day reports seem to have been rather typical for some such posts.²⁰² Nothing in the relatively rich epigraphic documentation from the center hints at the existence of posts such as the *eklogistai*, or, on a lower level, the various *epiteretai*. If the center of the empire worked rather like the Alexandrian subcenter with its various branches, we may assume that similar positions are concealed behind rather neutral titles such as *tabularius*. However, while this of course is possible, I do not think it very likely.

198. See, e.g., Wilcken 1908: 122ff. Cf. Anagnostou-Canas 2000; Cockle 1984; Burkhalter 1990.

199. As it had been in the developing European bureaucracies for a long time: see Körber 1998: 101.

200. See Peachin 2004: 82ff.

201. N. Lewis 1997.

202. See, e.g., Abd-el-Gany 1990; Hagedorn and Hagedorn 2000. See note 196 on the *eklogistai* and their tasks.

As to the provinces, imperial *coloni* sometimes addressed emperors or officials more than once because of the same problem. While they themselves preserved imperial letters or edicts issued in their regard, and published them, we hear nothing of at least annual reports on the situation between two petitions.²⁰³ We have some evidence for the interaction of Roman governors with prominent provincials in the Greek-speaking part of the empire. Now, while it is certainly true that the most important administrative acts, such as the nomination of provincials to “liturgical” tasks, were recorded (especially in the cities involved), the sources certainly indicate that social conventions left the governors as well as local members of the elite who had independent connections with the center quite a lot of room to maneuver; much of the communication between such persons of “honor” was probably never recorded, certainly not by “state organs.” Only the bare bones of the decision-making process might be placed on file.²⁰⁴ In regard to the levying of taxes in other provinces, nothing in the documents we know of hints at an equal importance of written documents, as in the case of Egypt.²⁰⁵ I do not argue here that administration in the Greco-Roman world outside Egypt did not make use of writing, records, memoranda, files, and so on. But our sources seem to indicate a significant difference in quantity, amounting, in fact, to a difference in quality. The existence of such a discrepancy, though not proved, can safely be assumed.

Although most of the papyri related to our subject date to the second century CE, such documents as we have from the first century make it fairly certain that some sort of bureaucracy was operating in Roman Egypt from the very start of Roman rule. But the model suggested above to explain the “bureaucratization” process in the empire at large clearly cannot be applied to this one province and its administration. Octavian inherited some kind of historical bureaucratic apparatus, which was then adapted to a new macroenvironment and aims—basically the transfer of surpluses in grain (sometimes at least partly commuted into money) to destinations indicated by the new rulers (Rome, other major Mediterranean cities, frontier zones where troops were deployed in larger numbers). Study of the bureaucratization process in Ptolemaic Egypt is beyond my scope here.²⁰⁶ In the Roman Empire, Egypt under the emperors became an administrative subsystem; an independent extraction-coercion cycle of the type described above could not be set in motion in a single province. To describe the administrative system in place in the Nile valley, other heuristic instruments are needed. The two most striking features of the province may offer a clue here. As noted above, Egypt, whoever ruled it, was absolutely dependent on the River Nile and

203. See *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 37.1186 = *L'Année Epigraphique* 1989: 729; *Orientis Graecae Inscriptiones Selectae* 519 = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3.14191.

204. Meyer-Zwifelhofer 2002: 117ff.; Meyer 2004; cf. Meyer 2006.

205. Wörle and Wurster 1997.

206. See Manning 2003 for a comprehensive study.

the irrigation system put in place to enlarge the fertile area of the country.²⁰⁷ Water was the scarce resource that all administration was basically built around. By necessity, most of the actual work invested in the process of bringing the land under cultivation was organized by agents working on the ground who could react to particular situations appropriately.²⁰⁸ But most of the central administrators were involved in the water regime, as they supervised local agents, regulated more complicated schemes of bringing land under cultivation (as, for instance, the head of the *idios logos*), set up a legal framework to settle disputes, and so on.

At the beginning of this section, I observed that most scholars by now agree that Egypt was never the private property of any emperor. On the contrary, the imperial estates that were continuously expanding in other parts of the empire never became a factor of major economic importance in Egypt; those there in fact were treated more or less like public land.²⁰⁹ We can only speculate on the reasons behind this untypical development. One may have been the special type of administration established by Augustus in this exceptionally rich region. Whatever the legal status of the former Ptolemaic kingdom (a Roman province) and the legal basis of the prefect's regime (a *lex publica*), Egypt was effectively governed by the emperor's private staff, a group of agents that had its roots in the household administration of the emperor and was used elsewhere precisely to deal with the emperor's private property. Augustus and his successors treated Egypt, then, *as if it were* imperial private property, without creating any political problems by formally turning it into private property. The taxes collected were used mostly to pay the troops and administrators in Egypt or to support the civic *annona*, the grain supply of the capital, organized by the emperor and his staff (the role of the senatorial *curatores frumenti dandi* was largely ceremonial).²¹⁰ Egyptian resources therefore were at all times closely controlled by the imperial staff. Under such circumstances, legal niceties such as who was the real owner of Egyptian grain hardly mattered.

It is against this background that we should try to categorize the imperial administration of Egypt and to find a label for it. That a people and their land were ruled as if the land was the private property of the ruler is exactly the most coherent "definition" Max Weber gave of a "patrimonial state/bureaucracy."²¹¹ In such a context, the attribute "patrimonial" makes perfect sense. Weber numbered Egypt (though probably not Roman Egypt), as well as early China, among the foremost examples for patrimonial bureaucracies.²¹² Weber saw parallels here that may still be of some, and not only antiquarian, interest today.²¹³

207. Bonneau 1964, 1972, and 1993.

208. Rathbone 2000.

209. Rowlandson 1996: 30. Cf. Parássoglou 1978: 28. But see now Beutler 2007.

210. D'Escurac 1976: 31ff.

211. Weber 1978: 1013. Compare this with Hui 2005: 220.

212. Weber 1978: 1013ff.; Weber 1984: 462–3.

213. Given the fact that I stressed the importance of the water regime for the specific form of administration in Egypt, the name of Karl Wittfogel, whose models were built around his ideas about "hydraulic societies," comes

4. QUESTIONS OF SCALE

By the third century at the latest, then, Roman society and administration were transformed by a process of protobureaucratization, stimulated by constant warfare and an increasing need for war-related resources. But up to the fourth century we have to deduce this development from very few pieces of scattered information. Only in the fourth and fifth centuries does the process of “bureaucratization” become more visible. This new visibility partly results from the fact that for this period we have more and better sources, like the law codes or the *notitia dignitatum*, a list of bureaucratic and military posts and units that in itself, however, is fraught with difficulty.²¹⁴ On the other hand, the process described in section 2 culminated in the fourth century, so that the administration became bigger and more uniform in outlook, and its traces become easier to follow.

As for numbers, most studies cite the calculation of Arnold Jones who, based on a combination of information taken from the *notitia*, the law codes, and other miscellaneous evidence, concluded that the late empire had roughly thirty-one thousand civil administrators on its payroll.²¹⁵ There is no way to compare this figure with the number of administrators employed during the high principate. Not even a guess has been made at the probable size of the motley group of soldiers, imperial slaves and freedmen, occasional freeborn agents, equestrian procurators, and senatorial magistrates active in those days. It seems very likely, though, that the numbers increased after the third century. This seems even more plausible when we take into account that Jones’s estimates should be considered rather conservative. Jones assumed that the most important agents, the praetorian prefects, had a mere one thousand officials at their disposal. Most scholars today double this figure,²¹⁶ thus raising the overall number of administrators to thirty-five thousand. Again, Jones estimated that no more than about forty-six hundred agents were active at the imperial headquarters in both parts of the empire. Peter Heather has since then convincingly argued for a total of about twenty-seven hundred in each *comitatus*.²¹⁷ We must add the personnel of the *res privata* who worked on the ground in the provinces (but no numbers whatsoever have come down to us).²¹⁸ More importantly, the empire used applicants as unpaid interns on a massive scale.²¹⁹ While these posts at times were

to mind. It is easy enough to refute Wittfogel, whose theories mirror the peculiar twists and turns of his own life, but if it is possible to overlook his ideological convictions and avoid his at times unacceptable terminology, there might still be some merit in his exposition.

214. Zuckerman 1998.

215. Jones 1964: 1411–5 n. 44.

216. Palme 1999. But the number could have been significantly higher, at least in the sixth century. Cf. Kelly 2005: 454–5.

217. Heather 1998.

218. Delmaire 1984.

219. For example, a law issued in 399 CE laid down that the *comes sacrarum largitionum* could employ 224 regular staffers, but an additional 610 so-called supernumerarii as well: Theodosian Code 6.30.15.

merely nominal, some of the so-called *supernumerarii* were real interns with probably a substantial workload. Some of these aspirants are already included in the numbers given above but very likely not all.²²⁰ Probably, then, the overall number of administrators was higher than thirty-five thousand. But as Christopher Wickham has remarked, these are just the administrators who belonged to the social elite (*honestiores*).²²¹ There may have been a substantial number of lower-ranking agents (e.g., the ox drivers of the *cursus publicus*). We cannot quantify such personnel. It may be doubted anyway whether such jobs are to be characterized as part of the civil service. But we should certainly take care not to include their counterparts in other societies when we try to make sense of Roman numbers by comparison.

Even more troublesome is the question of how we should categorize the administrative personnel in the various cities, tribes, villages, and so on that made up the empire. As most of the cities had enjoyed some sort of autonomy in the high principate, their magistrates and clerks are never included in calculations of the overall size of the imperial administration. Chapters 6 and 7 in this volume deal with urban administration in the Roman and Han Empires. Unfortunately, in trying to calculate the aggregate size of the local administrations, we are again severely hampered by the nature of our source material. While it may be possible to guess at the number of high-level administrators employed in some provinces, we have no idea of the numbers of clerks, scribes, and so on who were employed by these officials. The same problems recur when we turn to the late Roman city. For a long time, scholars tended to paint rather vividly the demise of the Mediterranean city as one of the most prominent features of late antiquity. But the characterization of late Roman cities has changed, as scholars rely more on archaeology than on presumptions:²²² cities in some regions at least flourished much longer than used to be thought.²²³ Still, the autonomy of cities grew shallower in time, as monitoring by governors became closer and local elites slowly turned away from traditional municipal engagement.²²⁴ If our sources do not mislead us, governors and their staff worked closely together with municipal agents,²²⁵ so that, at times, the distinction between city magistrate and imperial agent seems rather artificial from today's point of view. We cannot estimate the number of municipal personnel in, say, a province, let alone the whole empire. But given the facts mentioned in this section, it would be a mistake to doubt that the presence of the empire and its various officials on the different levels of

220. Jones 1949: 49–50; Sinnigen 1967.

221. Wickham 2005: 73. Some of the categories of agents mentioned by Wickham are in fact included in Jones's calculation.

222. Lavan 2006.

223. Krause and Witschel 2006. But see Liebeschuetz's carefully weighed conclusion in Krause and Witschel 2006: 463–83.

224. Laniado 2002; Banaji 2007: 50, 120.

225. Giardina and Grelle 1983; Kuhoff 2001.

administration was felt by the population, at least in the core parts of the empire. Contrary to the early principate, the empire was no longer present mostly in its symbols but was also present through its various agents.

5. TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE FOURTH AND EARLY FIFTH CENTURIES

I argued above that the Roman Empire underwent a process of protobureaucratization in the third century, stimulated by an increased need of resources in a period of constant wars. This basic constellation did not change much in late Roman times. The single most important factor in public life was still the standing army, very probably substantially reinforced in the late third and early fourth centuries, though the exact numbers are hotly debated. Some scholars maintain that more than 150,000 additional troops were added in the late third to early fourth century restructuring of the empire.²²⁶ While this number may be too high, some more modest increase seems likely.²²⁷ Most civil administrators were active in the provincial administration, whose basic task was to accumulate and redistribute the resources the army needed (while keeping the overall society homeostatic).²²⁸ But while for the third century we had to deduce the correlation between the size of the army and its development and the process of protobureaucratization from a few pieces of evidence, the interrelationships between tax rates, army size, and imperial expenses were openly discussed by writers and intellectuals in late antiquity so that our model from the middle of the fourth century on rests on a much more stable basis.²²⁹ The emperors themselves often addressed the crucial nexus of army costs, taxes, and administration in their official statements, as I will discuss in section 8.

However, there were some major transformations of the operational structures of the late Roman government that have to be considered before we can turn to administrative praxis. As discussed above, emperors during the principate entrusted the payment of the army and the supervising of the tax structures to members of their personal staff (procurators). Their aim (among others) had been to facilitate the monitoring of the administration in provinces with a substantial military garrison.²³⁰ After a civil service deserving of the name had been built up in the third century, other arrangements were made. In late Roman government, the management of the army and the civil administration were entrusted to separate branches of officials, with, at least nominally, no crossovers in careers and command

226. Whitby 2007.

227. Mitthof 2001: 26.

228. Roughly two-thirds of the 31,000 civil administrators proposed by Jones 1964: 1411–2.

229. See, e.g., *Peri Strategikes* 2.18 (Dennis); *De Rebus Bellicis* 5.1 (Ireland); Malchus, *Fragments* 15 (Blockley); Ammianus Marcellinus 20.11.5; Themistius, *Orations* 18.222 A; Gregory of Nazareth, *Orations* 19.14.

230. Eich 2004: 220.

structures.²³¹ This was merely a different way to achieve the same aim, so that we need not assume a fundamental change in administrative principles at this stage. But another reform of the first Christian emperor changed the outlook of the Roman protobureaucracy much more thoroughly. Constantine not only enlarged the senatorial order (that in a sense defined membership in the imperial aristocracy) and readmitted senators to the civil administration, but he also opened up the core of the administration, what (before the homogenization of the later third century) used to be the emperor's personal staff (the "equestrian administration"), to senators, thereby completely revising an administrative policy more than three hundred years old. Especially, prefects later were often chosen from very old and prestigious families, people who had rarely gained practical experience before taking up the post. Constantine went even further and laid the groundwork of a new senate in the eastern part of the empire in Constantinople.²³² To be sure, the eastern senate and its members never had the same kind of prestige as the traditional nobility that stemmed mostly from the Latin west, that is Italy, northern Africa, southern Gaul, or southern Spain. Even so, in the following century we can observe the development of a specific imperial aristocratic habitus among eastern administrators, fostered as much by traditional values and education as by the new rank system and the newly won prominence.²³³ But the consequences of Constantine's policies were more visible in the west and had a much greater impact on this part of the empire. There were certainly reasons for the reintegration of the nobles in the administration, which I will discuss shortly. But to entrust the administration of whole regions like Italy or northern Africa to a significant degree to nobles with enormous (landed) wealth and autonomous prestige was by all standards a problematic decision.²³⁴ I will examine some of the results in the following section.

Finally, another third-century development reached a new level in the fourth and fifth centuries. From the start of the principate, the emperors' household had functioned as an administrative center for the empire.²³⁵ It is, of course, possible to loosely term this center a court. But from a sociological or comparative viewpoint, a fully fledged court came into being only later, especially after the third century. Imperial politics were by tradition urban in nature, and the power elites relied heavily on urban administrative institutions. This urban character of the government acted as a check on the imperial "*aula*." But when the emperors left Rome for good in the third century, the urban heritage of the Roman Empire was much less able to restrain the development of the imperial household. Only then

231. This holds good at least for the fourth century, while this differentiation gradually came to an end in the fifth.

232. Heather 1994 and 1998.

233. Heather 1994 and 1998; Errington 2000.

234. Matthews 1975; Wickham 2005; Kiser and Cai 2003.

235. Winterling 1999; Paterson 2007; Smith 2007.

did the mobile headquarters of the emperors become the only effective center of the empire.²³⁶ When in the later fourth century the imperial *comitatus*, especially in the East, settled down again, this process could no longer be completely reversed. The next section will describe effects of this transformation, some sort of a “going into court.”

6. LATE ROMAN BUREAUCRACY: STRUCTURES, OFFICIAL EXPECTATIONS, AND PRAXIS

A short sketch of late Roman administrative structures can easily enough evoke the image of a highly efficient and rule-guided bureaucratic machinery. I will start with such a sketch, but it will soon become evident that no such implication is intended. To be sure, it is almost impossible to draw a picture of this administration at any specific moment, as the relevant pieces of evidence are scattered over a period of some three hundred years. Quite often, we cannot be sure to what degree our abstract descriptions are unhistorical in the sense that we are combining facts that do not belong together, but are separated by major changes through time. I mostly draw my examples from the late fourth century, that is before various centrifugal forces accelerated the split-up of the empire. But at times it will be necessary to add pieces of information from earlier or later periods to produce a coherent description. This caveat, then, has to be kept in mind.

The basic administrative unit of the empire was the province, some 114 in number in this period.²³⁷ Each province was ruled by a governor who usually had some 100 civil servants under his command.²³⁸ The governor was responsible mainly for jurisdiction and taxation. The provinces were grouped together and controlled by an official called a vicar who was superior to the various governors. From the second half of the fourth century on, vicars were subordinate to the praetorian prefects, the highest civil authority of the late empire, whose duties were extremely wide-ranging; originally, the vicars were conceived of as something similar to junior prefects and, as a result, had acted more independently.²³⁹ Most of the day-to-day business in the provincial administration was coordinated by the praetorian prefects²⁴⁰ with their rather large staffs (probably some 2,000 clerks, as noted above), whose functions were, at least by Roman standards, highly differentiated. If the descriptions offered by Johannes Lydus, who worked in the office of the eastern praetorian prefects in the sixth century, are relevant also to earlier stages of the history of this office, which seems likely,

236. Winterling 1998.

237. Jones 1964: 379.

238. Palme 1999.

239. Eich 2005: 250ff.

240. See Theodosian Code 15.1.2. (321).

procedures seem to have been highly formalized and technical.²⁴¹ The huge, somewhat amorphous responsibility of the prefects became more clearly contoured in late antiquity: the juridical literature of the late principate seems to have dealt with this post in more lucid terms,²⁴² and the sphere of competence of the prefects was defined, as it were, in a negative form, as new high-ranking officials such as the central *magistri militum* or the *magister officiorum* acted as checks on their responsibilities.²⁴³ Nevertheless, the workload of the prefects must have been enormous. They had to monitor the lower ranks in the provincial administration, they were the prime agency in promulgating imperial pronouncements, and they acted as judges, often as deputies of the emperors.²⁴⁴ Governors had to send their financial and judicial records to the prefects every fourth or every sixth month for auditing. (Lower administrative units, like the cities, whose officials worked closely with the provincial authorities, seem to have had their accounts audited more often, at least at times).²⁴⁵ There was a clear chain of command from the prefects down to the individual local unit of government. Next to the prefects, two other offices, the *comitiva sacrarum largitionum*, mainly responsible for transactions in precious metal, and the *comitiva rei privatae*, which saw to the administration of estates confiscated or bequeathed to the emperor, were of major importance for the financial administration of the empire. Both of them had their own chain of command and their own files, even though the *comitiva sacrarum largitionum* made use also of the staff of the governors in order to carry out its day-to-day duties in the provinces.²⁴⁶

In the fourth century, the Roman imperial court was a rather typical monarchical household-cum-administrative center. As a result, power strategies that can be labeled “patrimonial” were frequently employed by those within it; I shall turn to them shortly. First, I want to stress the other aspect of the court. The administrative components of the Roman emperor’s court certainly show traces of a bureaucratic organization. For example, the *quaestores sacri palatii* were the official spokesmen of the emperors, candidates being basically chosen for their rhetorical skills. But by the end of the fourth century the *quaestores* had evolved into some sort of chief legal advisers to the government.²⁴⁷ Nothing like a permanent legal adviser had existed during the nonbureaucratic principate in the first two centuries CE. The development of this office, then, is further evidence for the ongoing process of protobureaucratization, as more and more formal structures were being created.

241. For Lydus’s portrayal of the prefect’s office, see Kelly 2005.

242. Grelle 1987.

243. On the *magister militum*, see Demandt, *Realencyclopädie Suppl.* 12: 553–790 (s. v. “Magister Officiorum”); Eich 2005: 232ff.

244. Peachin 1996; Karayannopolis 1958: 80ff.; Gutsfeld 1998; Jones 1964: 586ff.

245. Jones 1964: 575–6; Giardina and Grelle 1983.

246. For all related questions, see Delmaire 1989.

247. Harries 1988.

The *quaestor* may have been the nearest thing to the position of the chancellor in Han administration, given his duties to draft imperial texts. Others, of course, participated in this process, as did the whole imperial council, whose procedures were highly formalized.²⁴⁸ Many decisions of the emperors were in fact mere approvals of suggestions made by high-ranking officials, on whom emperors relied because of their expertise.²⁴⁹ Still, the *quaestor* was the most prominent figure in the complex process of “laying down the law.” However, the position was somewhat special: the *quaestura* was more of a staff job, less integrated into the line of officials surrounding the emperor. The *quaestor* was assisted by the imperial secretariat with its various departments, basically responsible for composing letters and answering petitions. The heads of these “departments,” the *magistri libellorum*, *epistularum*, and *memoriae*, worked with and for the *quaestor*, but it is not clear whether they were formally subordinated to him (or to any other high-ranking official in the *comitatus*).²⁵⁰ Standard procedures seem to have been established for responding to questions of officials and petitions of cities or private persons,²⁵¹ but these procedures were never rigidly fixed. This may be attributed in part to a healthy flexibility, but even more so to the “personal” character of the administration:²⁵² emperors were absolutely unwilling to allow procedural rules to encroach on their power to decide in cases of friction or unclear divisions of responsibility.

Among the other high-ranking posts that brought automatic membership in the imperial council, the most important was probably that of the *magister officiorum*, whose holders combined in themselves some, but not all, of the duties of quite a number of Han officials of the Inner Court (though most of their duties were performed by the imperial chamberlains) and, more importantly, those of the three excellencies.²⁵³ Needless to say, the intersections of the respective areas of responsibility differed considerably in size. In fact, the *magister* was in charge of the entire communication between the court and the outside world. He controlled most of the clerks in the central administration. But at the same time he acted as a check on many high-level administrators outside the court whose chiefs of staff were chosen from among the former members of the *magister's* bureau, and were supposed to report back to him on any breaches of duty by their new superiors. The list of duties of the *magister* was in fact much longer than and, it should be stressed, disparate from that of any of his Han peers.²⁵⁴ Clearly, one major difference between the Roman and Han bureaucracies was

248. Harries 1998: 47ff.

249. See Theodosian Code 12.1.33; Ambrose, *Letters* 74 (40). 4; Theodosius II, *Novels* 18, 20; Valentinian III, *Novels* 6.2, 24, 36.1.

250. But see Matthews 2000: 178 on Theodosian Code 1.8.2.

251. Feissel and Gauscou 2006; Mourgues 1995.

252. Delmaire 1995: 69ff.; Mourgues 1995; Corcoran 2000: 57, 83, and 202.

253. As described by Bielenstein 1980: 7ff.

254. See Clauss 1980.

that the Roman government had far fewer high-ranking officials on its payroll. As a result, Roman officials often combined in their own person a whole range of widely disparate duties.

Both financial counts (*comites*) were members of the court and the *consistorium* as well.²⁵⁵ But the most important office, the praetorian prefecture, was a different matter. At the end of the fourth century there were four prefects. While the prefects had originally accompanied the emperors everywhere as their right-hand men, the prefectural office underwent major changes in the mid-fourth century. As a result, some of the prefects had their own subcourts at some distance from the imperial capitals, while the others were at least structurally no longer members of the immediate entourage of the emperors, “the inner court,” as this has been called by modern scholars.²⁵⁶ The whole development has for a long time been thought of as some kind of forerunner of the going-out-of-court process in European history. But the source of the prefects’ power was no abstract legal system but the imperial will, guaranteeing their position in the administration as well as in the social hierarchy. Instead of gaining power by some sort of rationalization, absentee prefects lost some of their clout with the emperors, precisely because they were removed from personally influencing the imperial “fountain of patronage.”²⁵⁷ These remarks already suggest the other side of imperial administration, to which I will turn shortly.

To conclude this description of the basic structures of the protobureaucracy, let us briefly look at official expectations. Emperors seem to have assumed that their administration worked smoothly and efficiently. They believed (or declared they believed) that even long chains of command would eventually bring about more or less the desired results,²⁵⁸ or that governors had sufficient legal expertise to deal with complicated legal issues.²⁵⁹ When administrators failed, the emperors (at times at least) reacted sharply (the antidote to corruption being terror).²⁶⁰ But these assumptions and this theory were not always matched by reality and praxis. And the emperors and their action very often were at the heart of such discrepancies.

Late Roman administration remained embedded in its various social contexts to an astonishing degree. While the overall society and its administrative subsystem are of course at all times closely interrelated and affect each other reciprocally, modern-day bureaucracies are characterized by their organizational autonomy. The Roman administration, whatever the rules and norms officially said to guide it, was permeated by the values of its traditional social environment. I have already

255. Weiss 1975.

256. Gutsfeld 1998.

257. Schlinkert 1996a; the quotation is taken from Peck 1990: 1.

258. Jones 1964: 403ff.

259. Corcoran 2000: 236–7.

260. Alföldi 1952: 28ff. The phrase given above alludes to the heading of chapter 3 in Alföldi’s book.

stressed the importance of the fact that in the fourth century a long trend of excluding senators from the administration was inverted, as the western nobles not only were reinstated in their old administrative fief as governors but also gained access to highly sensitive tasks from which they had been barred during the whole principate. The East, too, was, as it were, “senatorized.” Social status could easily be capitalized on in the surrogate markets of the historical bureaucracy.²⁶¹ Administrators hardly distinguished between their public posts and their private property. The behavior of administrators was usually guided by solidarity-based relations to persons within and without the government more than by their duties, and informal influence with powerful patronage brokers prevailed all too often over rules and norms.²⁶² Group solidarity therefore was an important obstacle to bureaucratization.²⁶³

This behavior and the attitude behind it were basically accepted by the society at large. Often enough, transgressions of official “bureaucratic” rules were condoned by the emperors, who at different times for other reasons could react sharply to minor infringements. These double standards are indeed typical for the imperial administration. In fact, the imperial court had become the biggest surrogate market for all kinds of social exchanges related to power. In the inner court, the most important instrument of personal power was to have access to the emperor. Access to the sacred center of the empire was not, of course, limited to officeholders. Much more easily, emperors could be called on by their family, personal friends, and attendants.²⁶⁴ Frequently, therefore, the court was dominated by some favorite whose influence reached much farther than his portfolio would suggest—if indeed such a thing as a “portfolio” existed. Favorites often were outsiders,²⁶⁵ and in the later Roman Empire the imperial chamberlain, the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, ended up as something of an institutionalized outsider:²⁶⁶ as a eunuch, this official originally was not supposed to play a leading role in the administration. But in the course of time, the *praepositi* were integrated in the senatorial aristocracy and from that point on acquired the rank to match their influence.

Most of this could be considered as happening in the twilight between the accepted and the unaccepted. Other behavior was not accepted at all but still frequent: corruption was rampant throughout the period; we will see this later.²⁶⁷

But the emperors undermined the administrative regulations, supposedly guaranteed by themselves, in another, perhaps even more important way. Quite

261. See Migl 1994, who then goes on, mistakenly, as I think, to deny the existence of a “bureaucracy” of any kind.

262. Migl 1994; Schlinkert 1996b: 84; Matthews 1975.

263. See Kiser and Baer 2005: 238 for parallels.

264. Wieber-Scariot 1997; Schlinkert 1996b: 84ff.; Matthews 1975; Krause 1987: 11ff., 50ff.

265. See my remarks in Eich 2005: 246ff.; Kaiser and Pečar 2003.

266. Scholten 1998.

267. Kelly 1998: 180; Schuller 1982.

often, they decided to play an active role in day-to-day administrative routine.²⁶⁸ The emperors, naturally, had nothing like a sphere of competence. They could get involved at every stage of any kind of business, and often chose to do so. This fact has often been cited as proof that the late Roman Empire was not a bureaucratic political system.²⁶⁹ From the point of view of comparative sociology, this verdict is hardly surprising, as has been outlined above. From the point of view of European history, however, this personal involvement of the ultimate source of authority in the routine conduct of affairs turned out to be quite typical. Monarchs, like the bureaucratic King Frederick II of Prussia, recommended this behavior, as do today's economic journals when they advise modern-day chief executive officers.²⁷⁰ Han experience seems to have been different, but only, I would suggest, to a certain degree.²⁷¹

Before moving from description to analysis in the following section, I would like to illustrate the impact of the mostly social factors discussed above, choosing an example from one of the most fundamental areas of administrative activity. Early Chinese protobureaucracies' claim to fame is to a significant degree based on the system of recruiting and promoting civil servants.²⁷² It is precisely here where the convictions, emotions, and political techniques of the Roman elites outlined above especially impeded the application of bureaucratic principles to the imperial administration.

Unfortunately, information about imperial appointment policy as far as the top-level jobs are concerned is scarce and scattered. Some of the most conspicuous offices were, at least in the western empire, reserved for high-born aristocrats.²⁷³ But others, especially in the East, seem to have been available for competition. Some emperors, like Constantius II, are lavishly praised for promoting only experienced officials and weighing the relative merits of each candidate. Others are attacked for favoritism.²⁷⁴ But such generalizations hardly permit us to grasp the criteria by which officials were usually chosen. In this respect we are much better informed on the lower echelons of the hierarchy, the various civil servants who staffed the bureaus of the high-ranking officials. As time went on, membership in the governors' bureaus became hereditary; the salary of this type of "clerk" was low; in the fourth century, it was usually paid in kind. Often, clerks seem to have lived on fees and bribes.²⁷⁵ The staffers

268. Kelly 1998 and 2004.

269. See, e.g., Migl 1994. Cf. Ertman 1997: 9 for a similar view on early European bureaucracies.

270. See Stollberg-Rilinger 1986: 62–75. Cf. *Financial Times*, May 1, 2002, p. 9. Even today monarchies can be constructed quite similarly: *Le Monde*, Oct. 8, 1999, p. 5: "Mais ce serait oublier qu'en Jordanie un tremblement de terre concerne avant tout le souverain."

271. See Zhao in this volume, chapter 3.

272. Kiser and Cai 2003; but see Scheidel 2009b and my general remarks in Eich 2005: 278ff.

273. Matthews 1975; Arnheim 1972.

274. See, e.g., Ammianus Marcellinus 21.16.3, 30.4.1.

275. Boulvert and Bruschi 1982; Kelly 2004; Marini Avonzo 1964. But see Heather 1998: 204ff.; cf. Banaji 2007 for a different view.

of higher officials were better paid; membership offered a chance to move up the social ladder, even though outside the court this was still an exception.²⁷⁶ It seems that most candidates for these jobs presented themselves at the respective bureau. Often, the applicants relied on some form of recommendation. However, compared with the situation in the Han bureaucracy, the system of recommendation was never rationally organized. As it turned out, the Latin word for political recommendation, *suffragium*, became a synonym for corruption or bribery, as candidates often simply paid for the support they otherwise could not garner.²⁷⁷ Whether *suffragium* was considered corruption or a necessary help depended ultimately on the question of whose influence was considered legitimate and whose not. Nothing is heard of competitive entry tests. In general, the imperial government seems to have taken for granted the possession of an adequately solid education by every member of the elite, as part of his social equipment. As already noted, quite a few of the imperial laws tell us something about the emperors' expectations of an ideal administrator.²⁷⁸ Reality, however, did not always embody these ideals, as the emperors knew perfectly well. Symmachus, a prefect of Rome, found out that some of his clerks could hardly read or write. Turning to the emperor Valentinian II for help, he was curtly told not to meddle with the imperial recruiting policy.²⁷⁹ Whether this was typical or not is hard to tell. In the sixth century, a middle-echelon bureaucrat, John Lydus, to whom I have already referred, proudly describes the complexity of his own department, the juridical side of the prefectural office, in rather technical language.²⁸⁰ At least at this time and for higher-ranking jobs, in-service training must have worked out.²⁸¹ Most of the lower-ranking civil servants seem to have carried out their highly routinized tasks sufficiently well for the administration to function more or less effectively.

Promotion was organized in an analogous fashion. Imperial laws often mention merit as a criterion for advancement.²⁸² This ideal, too, does not stand up to scrutiny. In fact, the single most important factor in the promotion of clerks was seniority.²⁸³ Maybe one can characterize the system as promotion "by seniority, modified by diligence."²⁸⁴ While this is certainly not the method of choice as compared to Weber's ideal type, it was widespread among historical

276. For the careers of late Roman officials, see Eck 2011.

277. Collot 1965. As time went on, rules for the orderly sale of offices were laid down.

278. See notes 258ff. and 282.

279. Symmachus, *Relationes* 17; cf. Pedersen 1976: 29.

280. See Kelly 2004.

281. Palme 1999: 115.

282. See, e.g., Theodosian Code 1.9.3, 6.24.3, 9, 27.7, and 14 (= Justinianic Code 12.20.1) 6.27.19, 29.4, 30.22, and 32.1 (= Justinianic Code 12.25.1), 7.3.1, 8.1.1, 2, 1.13, and 7.1.

283. Schuller 1982.

284. Jones 1964: 579.

bureaucracies.²⁸⁵ There the meritocratic Chinese bureaucracy seems to have been very different. By the time of the Eastern Han Dynasty, however, the recruiting policies of the two empires were converging visibly.²⁸⁶

In regard once more to professional qualification, the Roman Empire seems for a long time to have favored administrators with knowledge of Roman law. But during the principate the emperors did nothing to ensure that only those steeped in this subject were to be employed.²⁸⁷ In the fourth and fifth centuries, greater efforts were made in this respect.²⁸⁸ Some general statements can be found in our sources to the effect that taking classes at the famous university of Beirut was an excellent start for a career in the civil service.²⁸⁹ Most top-level administrators must have had some, however superficial, knowledge of the procedures of Roman law.²⁹⁰ But there still are examples to the contrary.²⁹¹ In this respect, there seems to have been a wide gap between official imperial declarations and reality. A variety of reasons can be adduced to explain this. I shall analyze the structural factors and the probable intentions of the actors involved in more detail in the next section. But it already has become clear, I think, that behind the constellation described was group power: in Rome, ruling the empire was, even in the East, considered an aristocratic domain most of the time. Most high-level posts were reserved for senators—whatever the practical implications of senatorial membership in the eastern empire at this stage may have been. Even social climbers from lower strata of society seem to have developed an “aristocratic attitude” once they gained access to “state power” through rising in the administrative ranks. Multiple elites as well as the administrators themselves formed powerful status groups in late Roman society. Combined with the general laissez-faire approach of the Roman elites, this aristocratic habitus resulted in a far lesser degree of formalization of the late Roman bureaucracy and a larger role for arbitrary decision making, at least outside those activities that did not concern the upkeep of the army.

The imperial administration, then, was characterized by conflicting features. Some of its basic structures were bureaucratic in nature, but the activity of many of the administrators, from the emperor down to the staffers of the governors, quite often can hardly be termed “bureaucratic.” While this discrepancy is in part characteristic of almost every bureaucracy, including modern ones, the gulf in Rome was extremely wide.

285. Merton 1968: 266; Le Masurier 1981: 12.

286. M. Lewis 2007: 70.

287. Peachin 1996.

288. Harries 1998.

289. Notably *Expositio totius mundi* 25; see Liebeschuetz, *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 15: 585–911, 889ff (s.v. “Hochschule”).

290. Honoré 1998: 11ff. and 1984; Matthews 2000; Coşkun 2001.

291. Libanius, *Orations* 33; see Carrié 1998: 25ff.

7. PRINCIPAL-AGENT RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LATE ROMAN ADMINISTRATION

Many of the contradictory features of Roman government can be explained by a sociological variant of contemporary agency theories.²⁹² The monitoring capacities of the administrative center were absolutely insufficient. Assuring the compliance of powerful individuals or groups had never been easy. Emperors had always relied on entrenched social power to secure their and Roman rule. Even in the fourth and fifth centuries, the administration in itself was neither big nor sophisticated enough to allow emperors to rule against the various other elites. It was desirable therefore to choose members of the social elites for the top-level jobs in administration, as they had the education, the prestige, and often the connections to handle the situations that governors, for instance, were likely to meet on the ground throughout the empire. On the other hand, bureaucratization, relying to some extent on abstract rules and guides, at all times has a leveling effect on social differences. Aristocrats therefore only went along with administrative rules and norms as long as the incentives were high enough and their social position was not endangered by any trends to impersonality. The emperors thus lacked the monitoring capacities to control the population at large without the elites, but they also lacked the means to efficiently monitor their aristocratic officials even if they wanted to (shared values often functioned as constraints here too). The options of the emperors were particularly stark in the provinces dominated by western aristocracies, such as Italy or parts of northern Africa or southern Gaul. To allow nobles to be governors or even praetorian prefects in regions where they and their families and other members of the same status elite often had enormous estates almost certainly amounted to a loss of control for the center.²⁹³ But to implement the emperors' will against those extremely rich nobles would have substantially raised costs in money as well as in political capital. There were only bad choices here (though, arguably, Roman emperors chose the worse one).²⁹⁴

Similar problems arose in the headquarters. As noted above, the emperors themselves did not always respect their own rules and guidelines. Monitoring capacity and its limits were again the basic reason for this. Roman emperors did not want to set up a bureaucracy for its own sake. First and foremost, they wanted to control the empire. The administration was devised to help them achieve this aim. But once administrative action became routinized, every emperor faced the danger of being pushed aside by his officials, becoming a mere puppet of his own administrative apparatus. Most emperors preferred to avoid this fate. They intervened quite frequently in petty matters to demonstrate that they were not just

292. See the brilliant essay by Kiser and Baer 2005 for further discussion.

293. Cecconi 1994 and 1998; Matthews 1975; Arnheim 1972; Vera 1994: 188.

294. Wickham 2005; Stein 1928: 101, 342, and 503ff.; Matthews 1975.

ritual heads of state but that they actually wielded power.²⁹⁵ As long as they could, they kept up a parallel pyramid based on influence, which worked as some sort of counterweight to the official hierarchy. Such conduct certainly does not meet the requirements of a Weberian bureaucracy. But in quite different contexts, similar strategies by top-ranking officials have been observed (though they are usually employed with less frankness): controlling parallel hierarchies based on social status and other influences of the social environment of any organization has always been a priority for all persons in authority.²⁹⁶ But the extent to which the Roman administration was embedded in its societal environment and the wide-ranging public acceptance of this constellation make up not just a relative but a qualitative difference between ancient and modern bureaucracies.

Monitoring problems increased, of course, the farther away from the center administrators operated and the longer the lines of communications. This was one of the reasons why the empire was, as Arnold Jones once said, centralized to a “fantastic degree.”²⁹⁷ Even minor officials were appointed by the emperors themselves; they or the praetorian prefects intervened in all sorts of petty business, or acted as judges in cases that at least from our point of view seem trifling.²⁹⁸ But even so, emperors and the high officials could not control everything, and they knew it. To monitor every operation in the various basic units of the empire, such as the cities, was a hopeless task. It has been assumed that municipal (that is, local) governments were almost strangled by imperial interventions in late Roman times. But while control was certainly tighter than in the early empire, from the point of view of the center a complete takeover would have been a major mistake; in fact, it never happened.²⁹⁹ The emperors and their advisers knew the limits of their monitoring capacity and acted accordingly.

Other differences between the Roman administration and the type concept of bureaucracy are even less specific than those already mentioned. “Corruption” is an almost universal feature in all kinds of administrative systems, though what actually constitutes corrupt behavior depends almost entirely on perspectives and prevailing values. To cite just a few examples from Roman contexts, the low salaries of clerks and minor officials were at the heart of bribery problems at this level; in fact, this was, and is, a widespread phenomenon.³⁰⁰ Rather than adequate pay, clerks received more elevated status. For them as much as for higher officials, the “state” and their service to it were an enterprise. They invested money to get a post in the civil service (bought it or bribed their way in or up) and afterward sought recompense in accordance with the norms of the societies and the

295. Migl 1994: 186; Jones 1964: 374ff.

296. Simon 1997; Mortara 1973: 121.

297. Jones 1964: 403.

298. Jones 1964: 1164 n. 81; Kelly 2004.

299. Schmidt-Hofer 2006.

300. Riggs 1964: 250.

opportunities provided by their activity.³⁰¹ But it would be mistaken to consider such transactions merely corrupt. As has often been stressed, in societies with either no entry tests or at least no competitive tests, the sale of offices added some transparency to the process of selecting officials.³⁰² There were usually limits as to who could buy an official post. In many societies, it was presupposed that only candidates with sufficient capability would enter the fray (though we cannot prove this in the Roman case).³⁰³ Candidates made use of their capital, whether money or intangible assets such as social or symbolic capital. Money, at least, was easier to come by than high status (though, of course, there always was a close interrelationship between them). Similar considerations can be applied to other forms of monetization in late Roman administrative action. People had to pay fees for an increasing number of services provided by imperial officials. While this, again, may be considered institutionalized bribery, it added a dimension of accountability to the mix, while influence based on social status and connections was much more difficult to counter or cope with for ordinary citizens of the empire. We can see the opposite principle at work, because there was no accountability, when we turn to the inflationary exploitation of honorary titles, a commodity easily capitalized on but restricted in use to the chosen few of sufficient social background.³⁰⁴

Many of the features and processes discussed above have parallels in other empires, and at least some, as the inflation of honors, the role of eunuchs, the emperor's relationship with his bureaucracy (though here differences have been stressed lately), and the constraints on the monitoring capacity, in Han China.³⁰⁵ When we come to the analytical and heuristic potential of such a comparison, much depends on whether we choose concave or convex lenses in focusing on them. It is easy enough to point to differences in scale, administrative behavior, mode of thinking, and so on. But there are also obvious similarities, as will become clearer, I hope, in the course of our discussion. I will return to the question of commensurability in my final section. But before concluding, it is necessary to look at one last fundamental category of organizational theory. Organizations do not simply consist of structures, functions, and so on. The activity of their members is governed to a significant degree by the dominant cultural orientations of these members concerning the organizational aims and *raison d'être*.³⁰⁶ There has been some comment on general or individual aims of emperors or the social contexts of the official activity. But it would be a mistake to conclude that,

301. Collot 1965; Veyne 1981.

302. See Kelly 2004. This does not hold true, however, for the sale of titular dignities that seems to have become very common in late antiquity.

303. Reinhard 2002: 190ff.

304. Kelly 2004.

305. On inflation of honors and the role of eunuchs, see Zhao in this volume, chapter 3; on monitoring abilities, see Kiser and Cai 2003; on the role of the emperor, see Fu 1996; but see Loewe 2006 for a dissenting voice.

306. Acham 1992.

apart from such personal though widespread interests, there were no ideal assumptions about administration that would have provided some orientation to Roman administrators.

8. SPIRITUAL GUIDELINES

Much has been written about the importance of Chinese political philosophy to the cohesion of the Han bureaucracy. It has been claimed that the main schools of thought functioned as something similar to a “bureaucratic ideology.”³⁰⁷ Such a characterization is surely misleading. In itself, say, Confucianism has no immediate affinity to bureaucracy.³⁰⁸ But the Chinese brand of Legalism that ultimately derived from political philosophy fostered the cohesion of administrators, uniting them in a common and internally rational belief system. And it seems to have provided or prepared an excellent nourishing medium for the peculiar Chinese version of a meritocracy, though, of course, as always, the term “merit” cannot be understood in a neutral way; its semantics are defined by the specific value system in place. Still, Legalism in the guise of political philosophy can be seen as some sort of spiritual guideline for the officials in the Han bureaucracy.

Nothing comparable existed in late Roman times. The Christian faith may well have served as the moral foundation of the empire, but it had no particular affinity with a bureaucratic system of administrative regulations. But the overall structure of the religious world after the late principate was well suited to provide some transcendental legitimacy to the immanent rulers of this world. Christians prided themselves on being monotheists as compared to the so-called pagans, who were often portrayed as rather silly or simple believers in an enormous variety of deities. But the very concept of monotheism is problematic.³⁰⁹ Even if we accept the term and the underlying idea at face value, the contours of the various religious groups recognizable in the late principate were certainly not as clear cut as the polemicists want to make us believe. From the Hellenistic Age there had been a strong tendency toward henotheism even in the Greek world, the very paradigm of polytheism.³¹⁰ This tendency grew stronger throughout Roman imperial history (though, needless to say, the religious landscape of the empire was a complete patchwork; I am only talking here about general trends).³¹¹ While faiths differed widely in the empire, a general trend toward a belief in a more structured and hierarchically organized heavenly world is certainly noticeable: among the cults and philosophies we can mention here are Platonism and its

307. See, e.g., Fu 1996, and Zhao in this volume, chapter 3.

308. See Hsiao 1977: 137 on what in fact was “legalism with a Confucian façade.”

309. Porter 2000.

310. Versnel 2000.

311. Athanassiadi and Frede 1999; Eich 2010; Mitchell and van Nuffelen 2010.

underworld,³¹² Stoicism, Hermetism, parts of the so-called Gnostic community, Judaism, Christianity, Pseudo-Christianity, and various syncretistic religions (e.g., solar cults). Even Greek polis religions showed signs of a stronger orientation toward a henotheistic notion of their gods' worlds, the experience of which became increasingly mediated by various types of holy men.³¹³

This trend may in part be contingent; other components may be ascribed to various, noninterrelated reasons. But to a significant degree a more general societal development may have been the force behind religious changes. Some possible explanations for the transformation described above are suggested by a study of Don Handelman of "public events," such as religious rituals in traditional societies, first published in 1990.³¹⁴ As Handelman points out, public events of this type are very often mirrors of the general construction of a society. While this explanation certainly does not hold good under all circumstances, it seems useful when we try to contextualize the above mentioned religious trend in the Roman Empire. The Greek political tradition as well as the Italian aristocratic heritage had been polyarchic; very likely, the same cultural tradition had permeated parts of northern Africa or those parts of the Balkan provinces that were heavily transformed by Italian settlers and their cultural orientations.³¹⁵ The Roman imperial monarchy was established in the second half of the first century BCE, but it took time for the new political system to become firmly established in all the heterogeneous societies with differing political traditions that together made up the Roman Empire. The henotheistic tendency grew stronger in the first century CE and became dominant in the third century. What we witness, then, is a different formalization of space, time, and beliefs in the wake of the creation of a—to some extent—bureaucratized form of rule. As Handelman has argued, in bureaucratic societies public celebrations mirror an ideal world. The new type of monarchy, then, seems to have been projected into the realm of heaven. That such a mode of conceptualizing the transcendental world was firmly rooted in the late Roman society has been convincingly shown by Christopher Kelly.³¹⁶ The empire became a fundamentally monarchic society in the second, third, and fourth centuries, and the widespread belief in a monarchical order of heaven and a hierarchical structure of the spiritual world could certainly serve as a strong reinforcement of the new protobureaucratic administration, as its construction was made to look inevitable and unchangeable. There is of course reciprocity between the two modes of conceptualization. But that does not take away from the legitimizing effects of the realm of beliefs on the superstructure of the empire.

312. Dillon 1977.

313. Schörner 2003.

314. Handelman 1998.

315. This was certainly different in many Syrian communities or in Egypt where the cosmic order and the monarchy had been thought closely interwoven for thousands of years: see, e.g., Edelmann 2007.

316. Kelly 2004.

Another set of beliefs may at least partially have served as a surrogate for Chinese “Legalism.” In republican and early imperial times members of the elite used the phrase *utilitas publica* to mean the common good, the welfare of all citizens, and, ultimately, that of the elite itself. In the early third century, when the coercion-extraction cycle that started the first wave of bureaucratization gained strength, the same expression described “the welfare of the state,” admittedly a still diffuse concept of “state,” with the emperor as its incarnation.³¹⁷ In late Roman times, the concept gained further connotations. The empire and the emperors were considered responsible for the welfare of their people in a much more concrete sense than before.³¹⁸ Various discourses of the emperors themselves and the literary elite claimed that the citizens of the empire approved of its government and supported the “state” apparatus as the guarantor of two essential concerns of every inhabitant of the empire: justice and security.³¹⁹ The emperors, considered to be above the law or the “living law,” claimed that the law was their guideline in whatever they did as rulers (a claim admittedly open to doubt).³²⁰ The imperial jurists, at least from the days of the Severan dynasty, worked to integrate these two essential aims into the body of Roman law, so that the emperors could govern by law (that is, a consistent system of abstract rules) without being subject to any limitations to their power imposed by these rules. Justinian, one of the last emperors of the antique empire, declared that the people voluntarily paid their taxes so that the armies, that bulwark of Roman civilization, could fulfill their duty and protect them.³²¹ Only when the armies were sufficiently paid could the ultimate aim of the emperors and the empire, justice and welfare for all, be achieved. The whole concept has been dubbed *arma et leges*, “the armies and the law.”³²² With this concept, we come much closer to the Chinese Legalist tradition,³²³ though, as in other aspects, the Roman counterpart was much less elaborate or formalized. The argument taken from the juxtaposition of *arma et leges* never became an ideology in the true sense of the word: it was a mode of communicating the general aims of the government to the people. The rise of a historical bureaucracy had opened up the possibility for the emperors to develop a paternalistic policy approach much wider in scope than anything that had gone before. This approach was designed to legitimize the heavy burden of extraction and coercion that the Roman Empire imposed on its (nonelite) citizens. And it still pointed clearly to the original and ultimate reason for bureaucratization: the needs of a professional army. Even in

317. Gaudemet 1951; Longo 1972; Coriat 1990: 227–8. Cf. Brooks and Brooks 1998: 34, 192.

318. Corcoran 2000: 4, 202; Martin 1984: 123; Eich and Eich 2004.

319. Eich and Eich 2004.

320. Karamboula 1993 and 1996. See Lewis 2007: 62 for at least vague similarities in Han China.

321. Justinian, *Novels* 72 (358.32ff.), 39 (255.11ff.), 78 (387.1ff.), and 21 (145.29ff.).

322. Dannenbring 1972.

323. See the definition of the imperial *ius novum* by Schiller 1949: 43: “The legal principles laid down in imperial constitutions or in decrees of a senate under the control of the emperor, together with the body of law fashioned by the state courts employing the *cognitio* procedure, have been termed *ius novum* by modern scholars. This was the law that served imperial policy, it was provided to satisfy the economic and social needs of the time.”

the fifth and sixth centuries (in the East), the standing army was at the heart of Roman governmental strategies and policies.

9. MACRO CONVERGENCES, MICRO DIFFERENCES, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MESO LEVEL

A few years ago, Christian Gizewski argued that Rome and early China (Qin and Han) developed in parallel for almost all their history.³²⁴ While his model, which comprises nine different phases, is certainly a useful reminder to historians of both cultures that there was not just one empire, some of the parallels at least pointed out by Gizewski can be characterized as vague, and the correspondences in time he marked out can be ascribed to contingent factors. It seems necessary to be more specific about similarities and differences and their various backgrounds, triggers, and developments. It is easy enough to point to differences on the respective micro levels of both empires. The mode of thinking, the conceptualizing of empire (though there are striking similarities as well),³²⁵ religious beliefs, the organization of social life in areas with a dense population,³²⁶ architecture, and so on can be taken as examples of this. But we should not let these obvious differences on the micro level interfere when we consider possible macro correspondences and convergences, especially, in this case, similarities between the structural and operational frameworks of the respective societies. Rome and the China of the Warring States, especially the Qin state, certainly did not follow similar routes while and after the groundwork for their later dominance was laid. In both Qin (to take this example) and Rome war molded the collective experience to a high degree. But this experience resulted in very different political strategies. Rome's power elites committed resources to the administrative center only when it proved absolutely necessary, whereas Qin and, later, Han was highly centralized from the fourth century BCE. But in fact their ways seem to have crisscrossed at a later stage, the late Roman and Han times respectively.

Walter Scheidel has pointed out that the political systems of both empires start to converge at some point; the operational frameworks of the late Roman Empire and the Han Empire certainly resemble each other. Most notably, the number of basic administrative units was roughly equal, leadership was divided into a civilian and a military branch,³²⁷ an administrative middle level supervised the operators on the ground, there were a number of central departments in the entourage of the emperors, and the courts as political centers were quite similarly constructed.³²⁸ Differences remain, though, as is to be expected. As the

324. Gizewski 1994.

325. Mutschler and Mittag 2008.

326. See Lewis 2006: 135ff.

327. See Graff 2002: 25 for basic similarities between the empires in this respect.

328. Scheidel 2009b.

Roman Empire was “bureaucratized” much later, in many respects, its bureaucratic structures, functions, and notions remained much less formalized, more flexible, and more deeply embedded in older structural contexts. Recruitment policies were much more patrimonial in the Roman case, and the organs of the central administration were much less differentiated than in Han China. The “spiritual guidelines” of the administrators, too, differ markedly. These differences, though, seem no longer to have a qualitative effect; a single scale can be applied to evaluate the political techniques, strategies, and, as it were, performances of the two empires.

Still, even on the macro level of operational structures, there were differences that one should keep in mind in comparing these two empires. The single most important difference from my point of view remains the fact that Rome, from the days of Augustus, had tied its fortunes, its success as well as its ultimate failure, to the professional army that Augustus had created and later emperors had built up to numbers reached in the West again only in the heyday of the formerly so-called absolutism.³²⁹ The Eastern Han Dynasty came closer to this model, but the distinction remains obvious.

The best-known argument for a wide discrepancy in the respective experience of empire, the conjectured gap in the number of administrators employed by Rome and Han, has become somewhat weaker in the course of this discussion. The number of high-level administrators in Rome was probably greater than assumed.³³⁰ Still, the distance between the respective numbers remains significant. The crucial factor at work here has just been noted: the Roman government left much of the administrative groundwork to the various agents in the basic units of social life, mostly city administrators and their staffs. We can only speculate about the scale and effectiveness of these municipal agents but their combined number was certainly big enough to equal the overall number of Chinese bureaucrats. The Roman government could reap some benefits from this decision: monitoring problems were reduced and transaction costs lowered significantly, as the imperial bureaucracy could concentrate on its core activities above the municipal level. On the other hand, the imperial power elites accepted that every single municipal representative remained deeply embedded in his specific social environment and operated out of his personal social networks. Urban administrators thus improved their standing and their bargaining power vis-à-vis the central government. The power elites, of course, knew this perfectly well, and in the course of the third and more visibly to us the fourth century started to encroach on the autonomy of the cities. Very slowly, the municipal councils lost their grip on the cities, and social power as well as administrative responsibility was laid on or fell to the landowners as a social group, who did not show the same

329. Tilly 1992: 78.

330. See above, section 4.

lively interest in the political autonomy of their community.³³¹ Late antique cities did not simply fall apart, as was long assumed (though there were certainly regions that suffered from a long and hardly reversible decline, such as northern Gaul). But many late Roman cities had more in common with Egyptian “cities” after the time of Septimius Severus than with their ancestors of the first century CE. They were much more integrated in the imperial chain of command. The Egyptian parallel seems helpful in another way as well. In this particular province the Roman conquerors had been confronted with a well-advanced patrimonial bureaucracy. It must have seemed natural to transfer some Egyptian administrative principles to the operational framework of the empire when the process of protobureaucratization accelerated in the third century. A thorough analysis of such transfers is lacking, but this seems indeed to be what happened, as some random studies in the subject indicate.³³² This interrelationship between the Egyptian and the late Roman administrations throws some light on the comparative approach here as well. When we take a closer look at the Chinese methods of recruiting and employing personnel, they show more affinity with the Roman-Egyptian model of administration than with that of the rest of the empire before the late Roman period. Thus we can detect another set of converging trends in the development of these two empires. But though there was a process of convergence, these converging lines never actually meet. The differences on the meso level of the respective societies, that is the organization and administration of the communities of which the empires consisted, remain a crucial distinction between the Roman and the Qin-Han Empires. Even in the late fifth century and in the Roman East even in the sixth century, before the trajectories of both empires started to diverge again,³³³ the Roman cosmos still consisted of an agglomeration of cities and their various surrogates.³³⁴

331. Laniado 2002.

332. See Coriat 1990: 226 for a discussion; Haensch 2008.

333. Scheidel 2009b.

334. Krause and Witschel 2006.

State Revenue and Expenditure in the Han and Roman Empires

Walter Scheidel

Follow the money, always follow the money.
—“Deep Throat”

1. SKELETONS OF EMPIRE

Anybody who wants to understand the scale of state power and the nature of state-society relations would do well to follow this advice.¹ As Rudolf Goldscheid memorably put it, in Josef Schumpeter’s quote, “the budget is the skeleton of the state stripped of all misleading ideologies.”² Like all states past and present, ancient empires were sustained by their ability to extract resources that could be used to enforce their claims to people and territory and to reward their agents and allies. The state’s share in total output serves as an index of its actual power, just as information about the sources of revenue and the way it was spent reflects the bargaining processes that mediated relations between rulers and ruled and enables us to identify the winners and losers of state formation.

Given the Han and Roman Empires’ success in controlling a large share of the world’s population for hundreds of years, their “fiscal skeletons” are of obvious interest. In the absence of solid statistics, any attempt at comparative analysis inevitably involves more conjecture than many historians will feel comfortable with. Yet I hope to show that even allowing for large margins of uncertainty, meaningful patterns do emerge. Inasmuch as this exercise promises to shed light, however dimly, on the inner workings of these vast and precociously ambitious organizations, it is a challenge from which we simply must not shy away.

I am indebted to Michael Loewe, Gilles Bransbourg, and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

1. That there is no actual record of this quote prior to the 1976 movie version of *All the President’s Men* (see W. Safire, *New York Times* Aug. 3, 1997) does not detract from its validity for historians.

2. Schumpeter 1954 [1918]: 6 (from Goldscheid 1917).

The study of imperial resource management (I deliberately avoid the term “budget” to steer clear of potentially anachronistic notions of modern accounting and fiscal planning) may be approached by focusing either on income or on expenditure. In practice, the general poverty of the historical record forces us to draw on data and estimates from both sides of the equation in order to gain a better sense of fiscal balances. I proceed in three steps: after establishing the approximate scale of government finances in both systems, I ask if and how they differ in the distribution of revenue sources and spending targets and finally consider possible implications and long-term consequences.³

2. HAN REVENUE

Evidence for state revenue is concentrated near the end of the Western Han period. The population count for the year 2 CE reports 57.7 million registered individuals who lived in 12.4 million households and cultivated an area of 827 million *mou* or 381,000 square kilometers.⁴ The best fiscal data for this period come from a cache of documents discovered in 1993 in Yinwan that provide detailed information about the administration of Donghai Commandery (in Shandong) around 15 BCE. One of these texts puts the total population of the commandery at around 1.4 million people in 266,000 households. This compares somewhat awkwardly with tallies of 1.56 million and 358,000 households in the census of 2 CE: however, while the discrepancy concerning households seems troubling, the more important population figures are broadly similar. The total amount of cultivated land in the commandery is given as about 31 million *mou* or 14,300 square kilometers, approximately 1 hectare per person or roughly 1.5 times the per capita mean reported for the empire as a whole in the census of 2 CE. Government revenue for the year stood at 266.6 million cash and 506,600 *shi* of grain, of which 145.8 million cash and 412,600 *shi* had already been spent.⁵

Assuming—although we cannot be sure—that these numbers represent total state revenue and given that Donghai Commandery accounted for approximately one-fortieth of the imperial population⁶ and that (apart from its unusual size) it might be considered a reasonably “average” province in the sense that it was located neither in the metropolitan region nor in the highly developed old core of the Great Plain nor peripherally, and therefore was arguably not entirely unrepresentative in terms of its overall economic development, extrapolation from the reported tallies implies an annual imperial revenue of about 10.7 billion

3. I concentrate on orders of magnitude and distributional issues, in part to provide a basis for broader discussion of the underlying fiscal regimes, which are the subjects of several contributions by Mark Lewis, Kent Gang Deng, James Tan, Gilles Bransbourg, and me in Monson and Scheidel forthcoming.

4. Bielenstein 1987: 13–14.

5. Loewe 2004: 60.

6. The evidence suggests ratios (empire : commandery) of 37 and 41.2 to 1.

cash and 20.3 million *shi* of grain. Priced at 50–75 cash/*shi* = *hu*, this would yield a grand total of approximately 12 billion cash.⁷

While this is undoubtedly an exceedingly crude extrapolation, it happens to match a total of 12.3 billion cash in state revenue reported in a fragment of the *Xinlun*.⁸ According to this source, from the late Western Han period onward more than 4 billion cash was annually collected in taxes, half of which was spent on the salaries of civil servants and half of which was set aside for emergencies. In addition, the Lesser Treasury is said to have generated an income of 8.3 billion cash to be used for the maintenance of the court and the emperors' gifts and rewards. Yet although this match might seem superficially appealing, the notion that the Lesser Treasury enjoyed twice as much income as the Ministry of Agriculture is highly dubious given that the latter received all major taxes as well as monopoly revenue and was responsible for paying officials and the military, whereas the former primarily sustained the imperial court, paid for imperial gifts and bestowals, and funded the production of luxury products and armaments. One solution has been to reduce the intake of the Lesser Treasury to 1.3 billion cash by emending the text.⁹ It is hard to see how the Lesser Treasury, which derived income in the first instance from imperial parks, taxes on natural resources claimed by the state (such as timber, fishing, and hunting but significantly excluding salt, iron, and precious metals), rent on government land, and the operating profits of the mint, could have taken in over 8 billion cash per year. The mint was credited with issuing 230 million cash per year, an output that could not have meaningfully contributed to ten-figure revenues. The poll tax on children, also allocated to the Lesser Treasury, could not have yielded more than 200 million cash per year, and the annual tribute offered up by the top nobility of close to 400 kilograms of gold was only worth between 15 and 30 million cash.¹⁰ Even so, as we will see below, while textual emendation would reduce Lesser Treasury income to a superficially more plausible level, it does not help explain the absence of military spending from this account and fails to generate a credible overall state revenue total that is compatible with the Yinwan records.

Alternative conjectures are possible but similarly shaky. If we were to assume that the reference to the over 4 billion cash in taxes available for salaries and savings were to those revenues that reached the central government, this tally might be taken to reflect the surplus that was remitted from the provinces' net of local

7. For grain prices, see Scheidel 2009d: 200–1 n. 292.

8. In Pokora 1975: 49. The original text was lost after the Tang period and later reconstructed (T. Pokora in Loewe 1993: 158–60).

9. Nishijima 1986: 594; cf. Pokora 1975: 59. The amount of 8.3 billion oddly reappears in a passage in the *Hanshu* according to which financial reserves under Yuandi (49–33 BCE) amounted to 4 billion for the Ministry of Agriculture, 2.5 billion for the superintendent of waterways and parks, and 1.8 billion in the Lesser Treasury (Nishijima 1986: 594), for a total of 8.3 billion cash. The 4 billion in savings echo the 4 billion in annual income of the same ministry. One wonders what to make of this.

10. See Scheidel 2009d: 187–98 for Han coin output and quality. For the children's poll tax, see below. For the tribute and the cash value of gold, see Scheidel 2009d: 162–3, 166.

expenditure. In that scenario, the 120 million cash that had not been spent in Donghai would have been available for transfer to the center, schematically implying total revenue of under 5 billion cash and consistent with the more than claimed 4 billion in tax revenue, if only on the assumption that the Donghai tallies did not include income of the Lesser Treasury. Then again, we cannot be sure whether the 55 percent of cash revenue and 81 percent of grain revenue that had been spent had been expended locally or whether they included remittances to the central authorities, and thus whether the savings were earmarked for transfers or represented genuine savings.¹¹

The only thing that is reasonably clear from the Yinwan documents is that overall state revenue in the late Western Han period must have been considerably more than 4 billion or 5.3 billion cash unless we assume that Donghai's per capita contribution to state coffers was up to three times the imperial average or that the records had been massively falsified to impress superiors.¹² The fact that the only way to reconcile these data with the *Xinlun* is by accepting a predominance of the Lesser Treasury not only in overall state income but also more specifically in revenue from the Shandong region calls for skepticism, as does the schematic division of tax income into one-half civilian salaries and one-half savings and especially the absence of military spending, which must have been considerable at any time. The most sensible solution might be to ignore the *Xinlun* passage as irremediably flawed and rely instead on extrapolation from the Yinwan data, notwithstanding uncertainties about their representative character.

In theory, it should be possible to check the latter against an estimate of probable income based on reported tax rates. In practice, however, this approach is fraught with difficulties, especially since nominal tax rates cannot simply be taken to reflect effective tax rates: the latter might fall short of the former by a wide margin. Bearing this in mind, we proceed with a deceptively simple question: in the late Western Han period, how much tax revenue would close to 60 million subjects have generated in a given year? Liabilities concerning the poll tax are relatively easy to estimate.¹³ Near the end of the Western Han period, the annual poll tax would have stood at somewhere from 80 to 120 cash for each adult aged fifteen to fifty-six. In an ancient population, some 55 to 60 percent of the population would have fallen in this age range. Consequently, some 34 million adult taxpayers would have owed between 2.7 and 4.1 billion cash, disregarding higher rates for merchants and slaves who would not have made up more than a small fraction of the population. Children aged seven to fifteen owed 23

11. Cf. a reported breakdown of Tang revenues in the mid-eighth century CE, according to which two-thirds of cash revenues and seven-eighths of grain revenues were expended in the provinces (Twitchett 1963: 156; see below, n. 103). The Yinwan data would allow a broadly comparable reconstruction.

12. For the possibility of higher-than-average state income in Donghai, see below, nn. 18 and 21.

13. For this and the following taxes, see Nishijima 1986: 595–601. See also Lewis forthcoming.

cash per year, for a total of 200 million or so. Total liabilities would have been in excess of 3 billion and probably between 4 and 5 billion cash.¹⁴

The expected income from the land tax of one-thirtieth of output capacity depends on average yields. If we treat the aggregate output of the 827 million *mou* of cultivated land as equivalent to that of grain fields and conservatively assume an average yield of 1.5 *hu* per *mou* (or 650 liters per hectare) and local prices of 50 to 75 cash per *hu*, we obtain a tax share of approximately 40 million *hu* or 2 to 3 billion in cash.¹⁵

If property taxes had still existed in this period, they would have had the potential to add greatly to this tally. Instituted under Wudi to fund his massive campaigns against the Xiongnu, a rate of perhaps 1.2 percent on all property and higher rates for merchants could easily have translated to several billion cash per year. For instance, if a hypothetical farming household of five owned land, housing, and equipment worth 20,000 cash, the assets of the working population alone would have been sufficient to bring in close to 3 billion cash. Elevated upper-class liabilities would have added considerably to this burden. However, as Mark Lewis has pointed out, there is no evidence for the survival of this tax after Wudi and it may therefore be best to assume that it was no longer current.¹⁶ In any case, the reported tax rates would have represented a very heavy burden: 1.2 percent of assets would have equaled a much higher share of the harvest than one-thirtieth, and a rate of 5 percent for the rich would have approached likely total returns on investment on capital. Such rates seem effectively unsustainable in the long term and were in any case unnecessary once Wudi's war efforts had ceased.

Commutation taxes, which may have been important as conscription declined in the late Western Han period, can be expected to have contributed further revenue. Adult men may have paid 3 cash per year, for an annual total of a mere 50 million, but actual levies may have been much higher. Each year, under generic assumptions about age structure, around half a million men were theoretically liable to serve in the army for one year, and the buyout fee may have been as high as 300 cash per month. Revenue from this source may have reached hundreds of millions.

14. Loewe 2010b: 318–9 reports a recently discovered tally in official documents for what looks like Dongyang County in Jiangsu, which refers to poll tax registration of almost precisely twenty thousand individuals (and some two thousand exemptions) in a population of some forty-one thousand people. The implied percentages of 49 to 54 percent (depending on whether exemptions are part of the tally or separate) are consistent with the relative share of those aged fifteen to fifty-six in a population with a very low mean life expectancy at birth (say, twenty years with modest growth, or somewhat higher life expectancy at birth if adult mortality was higher than in standard models), implying a high degree of taxpayer capture at least within the registered population.

15. This is necessarily a rough approximation but unlikely to be wide of the mark: total output of 24 billion liters (i.e., 40 million *hu* times 30) would translate to about 400 liters of grain (equivalent) per person and year, a reasonable value for an ancient society. See Hsu 1980: 75 for data implying yields of 1.2 or 1.5 *hu* per *mou* as well as a hypothetical amount of 3 *hu* per *mou*; and Deng 1999: 162 for an estimate of 1.9–2.8 *hu* per *mou*, which he thinks may well be too high. Recently published data from the Qin site of Liye show much higher land tax rates in 212 BCE: see below, n. 106.

16. Lewis forthcoming.

Other sources of revenue are even more difficult to quantify. The annual gold offerings of fief holders appear to have been comparatively modest. We have no idea of the scale of income from the salt and iron monopolies, although given their prominence in the record it may well have been considerable, as would have been revenue derived from (other) imperial properties.¹⁷

Very broadly speaking, these estimates point to projected state revenue of the order of maybe 7 to 10 billion cash per year, or significantly more only if some forms of property taxes were still on the books. This result, however tenuous, is very roughly compatible with the Yinwan data, especially as the hypothetical total of 12 billion extrapolated from the latter might well be too high.¹⁸ This, in turn, would suggest relatively high rates of taxpayer compliance, in that actual revenue was not merely a modest fraction of expected revenue but relatively close to projected liabilities.

The main alternative to this reading is to assume that monopoly and domain income was much more important than direct taxes and thereby offset massive underperformance regarding the latter.¹⁹ At least as far as monopoly income is concerned, this does not seem plausible given the (admittedly short-lived) experiment with abolishing the monopolies from 44 to 41 BCE. At the same time, domain income remains impervious to computation. Although the high quality of census registration in the late Western Han period would presumably have facilitated collection of direct taxes, it does not by itself document strong taxpayer compliance because similarly good census coverage under the Tang coincided with high rates of tax evasion.²⁰ Even so, the notion that direct taxation, though not nearly as well supported as we might wish it to be, was the mainstay of the system is consistent with local data.²¹ The logical corollary of relatively

17. Nishijima 1986: 602–7. On the institution, see, e.g., Wagner 2000. Precious metal mining was far less significant in ancient China than in the Roman Empire: see Golas 1999: 109–36; Scheidel 2009d: 179–80.

18. Since Donghai reportedly accounted for one-fourtieth of all Han subjects but one-twenty-seventh of all cultivated land, extrapolated overall state revenue should perhaps be put at closer to twenty-seven times than forty times the commandery tally, for a total of closer to 8 billion than 12 billion cash, or more if domain income was concentrated in the Guanzhong region. Moreover, income from the salt monopoly may have been disproportionately important, as Shandong has long been established as a center of the industry and Donghai bordered on the sea. If, as in later periods of Chinese history (cf., e.g., Huang 1974: 193 for the Ming Dynasty), wholesalers obtained salt directly from the salt fields, considerable income could have accrued to the commandery. Three of the thirty-four known salt agencies of the empire were located in Donghai, in addition to two of forty-eight iron agencies (Loewe 2004: 64–70). (In later periods, however, the northern coast of Shandong was more important: see Chiang 1975: 94 fig.1).

19. A third option, that both direct taxes as well as monopolies and domains generated very high incomes, is implausible in terms of what we know about state demands, discussed below. For estimates of total state revenue of closer to 20 billion cash, see, however, Yü 1967: 62–3 (whose calculations are worthless) and Chang 2007a: 85–6 with 355–6 n. 54 (generally a maximizing account).

20. Twitchett 1963: 34.

21. The notion of strong compliance meshes well with the high rate of taxpayer capture indicated in the Dongyang texts (above, in the text at n. 12). Reported income in Donghai was so high that it is difficult to imagine how it could have been achieved in the face of widespread evasion of direct taxes. Thus, even with perfect compliance a population of 1.4 million would not have generated more than 100 million in poll taxes, or a bit more if higher rates for some groups are included. Land tax income is harder to estimate but at 1.5 *hu* per *mou*, a 3.33 percent tax would have yielded 1.6 million *hu*, or the reported 500,000 *hu* plus 50–75 million cash. But actual yields might have been lower: at 100 *hu* for a household of four, total tax would drop by a quarter. (For the logical implications of these

strong compliance raises intriguing comparative questions to which I will return at the end.

3. ROMAN REVENUE

In contrast to those of the Han Empire, Roman state finances are usually approached from the expenditure side, by reconstructing the scale of overall outlays (and thus revenues) from estimates concerning its constituent elements.²² After exploring the potential of this perspective, I hope to show that more direct conjectures about revenue that have not previously been attempted in a systematic way likewise hold considerable promise. I focus on the first two centuries of the imperial monarchy, a period of stability between the civil wars of the first century BCE and the dislocations of the third century CE.²³ The best information on spending is available for the military. For the second century CE, Richard Duncan-Jones estimates army salaries of 600 million sesterces or up to 700 million including discharge bonuses, while Reinhard Wolters arrives at 535 million.²⁴ These totals need to be adjusted for two countervailing factors. On the one hand, troops may well have been significantly understrength at least in peacetime (which would have reduced actual costs); on the other, nonsalary costs on items such as animals and materials, which are not included in existing estimates (and would have raised costs), also need to be taken into account.²⁵ We cannot be sure to what extent these two variables would have canceled each other out. Given that the military itself engaged in production and construction, routine nonsalary costs need not have amounted to more than a small fraction of salary costs. By contrast, military campaigns are known to have increased outlays and should be factored into long-term averages.

Civilian expenditure is thought to have accounted for a smaller slice of the pie. Duncan-Jones estimates 75 million sesterces for administrators' compensation, 40 to 50 million for handouts to the metropolitan population and military units, 20 to 60 million for construction, and 50 to 100 million for other items such as the imperial court, gifts, and subsidies. This yields a total of between 190 and 280 million sesterces in nonmilitary spending, compared with 265 million according to Wolters, the same order of magnitude. This results in annual expenditure totals of roughly 800 million and between 800 and 1,000 million

figures for levels of monetization and tributary integration, see below, §4.1.) Another 100 million cash or so in revenue from other sources would be required to reach the reported total: as noted above (n. 18), salt monopoly revenues may have made a substantial contribution.

22. The situation for the late Roman Empire is different; see below, §4.2 and 4.3.

23. For calculations concerning the republican period, see, e.g., Frank 1933: 141, 145, 228, and 230; Knapowski 1961, 1967.

24. Duncan-Jones 1994: 33–7; Wolters 1999: 211–8, 223. Cf. Rathbone 2007: 174 (680 million as “theoretical total”).

25. On understrength troops, see now Bang 2013: 420–1; on nonsalary costs (especially related to animals), see Herz 2007: 314–9. On variation between peace and campaigns, see Rathbone 2007: 174–5.

sesterces.²⁶ Agreements among recent estimates provide a measure of comfort. However, while it would seem impossible to compute greatly different outlays for the military, state agents, and cash handouts, items such as civilian construction and discretionary spending are more difficult to quantify.

It is sometimes suggested that state investment in infrastructure was very considerable.²⁷ The critical question is: how much larger could such outlays have been? While Duncan-Jones's "guesstimate" of 20 to 60 million lacks a solid foundation, it would be hard to envision expenditure that was dramatically—say, by up to an order of magnitude—higher.²⁸ Our imagination is constrained by the observation that annual spending in the hundreds rather than tens of millions sesterces would have produced much more infrastructure than we can readily account for. Thus, at one-half of estimated military spending, 300 or 350 million sesterces spent on construction would have been enough to fund the equivalent of the gilding of the roof of the Temple of the Capitoline Triad or the construction of two major metropolitan aqueducts or several Baths of Caracalla or ten Basilicae Aemiliae or dozens of provincial theaters or aqueducts every year, or to build or replace the entire principal road network of the Roman Empire once every generation.²⁹ Even with optimistic assumptions about the scale of state-sponsored provincial construction projects—which would have had to absorb most of this spending—this seems far too generous to be plausible.³⁰ A related

26. Duncan-Jones 1994: 37–46 (800 million to 1 billion); Wolters 1999: 218–223 (800 million). Frank's 1940: 51–4 guess of 1.2 to 1.5 billion under the Flavians owes too much to literal readings of rhetorical passages to bear any weight. Rathbone 2007: 175 fails to offer any support for his guess that military outlays accounted for less than half of the imperial budget.

27. Wilson 2009: 81.

28. Duncan-Jones 1994: 42 (up to three times the cost of gilding the Capitoline Jupiter temple by Domitian, annualized across his reign).

29. Plutarch, *Publicola* 15.3 (temple); Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 36.122 (aqueducts; cf. Frontinus, *On Aqueducts* 7.4); DeLaine 1997: 219–20 (baths); Plutarch, *Caesar* 29.3, and Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.26 (basilica); Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.39.1; Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 2.548 (provinces); Duncan-Jones 1982: 124–5 (roads). This survey expands on my comments in Scheidel 2009c: 62 n. 67. Thornton and Thornton 1989: 135–9 compute imperial construction projects under the Julio-Claudians as 57,506 work units, or 4.3 times those for the two aqueducts that cost 350 million, for a total of 1.5 billion sesterces or 16 million per year. Even allowing for the extraordinary shakiness of the whole exercise, and expanding massively to account for pricey building materials for some types of structures, this provides at least a sense of likely order of magnitude. Thornton and Thornton also (141–4) estimate that the draining of the Fucine Lake, a major project under Claudius, could not have engaged more than three thousand workers at a time rather than the thirty thousand claimed by Suetonius, *Claudius* 20.1 (a classic symbolic figure: see Scheidel 1996). If we reckon very generously with a daily wage of 6 sesterces and three hundred annual workdays and allow for other expenses equivalent to labor costs, this project might have cost 10 million sesterces per year. The entire *alimenta* scheme in Italy could not have cost more than a few hundred million even if coverage was complete; its establishment appears to have been spread out over a number of years and the payout was less generous than in some private schemes (Duncan-Jones 1982: 302–3, 317–8).

30. That said, a comprehensive survey of imperial building activity in the provinces would be of great help in addressing this question (see now also Dey 2011: 830). While the most detailed study, Boatwright 2002, does document expansive investment under Hadrian, we are left wondering how typical this was. More importantly, even this rich evidence is perfectly compatible with my estimates. Her list of "architectural and architectural donations" to provincial cities (109–11) refers to some seventy projects ranging from aqueducts to tombs. If we rather generously assigned an average net cost (to the treasury) of 3 million sesterces to each of them—with some costing more and others, such as tombs, (much?) less—and furthermore guessed that only one-tenth of actual projects are actually known (a guess that would logically predict donations to over six hundred cities or one-third of all cities in the

outlay, disaster relief, is very sporadically attested at the level of 4 to 10 million sesterces per event, but only the capital itself could expect to command much higher subsidies.³¹

Gifts to the ruler's entourage may have been quite substantial: Nero's gifts were said to average more than 150 million per year, but outlays on that scale—even if not rhetorically inflated—counted as exceptional and some recirculation of such benefactions occurred (see below).³² Long-term mean annual spending on gifts would therefore most likely have remained in the eight-figure range. The grain dole in the city of Rome is often excluded from calculations of state spending but was certainly part of it. At 60 *modii* of grain (ca. 400 kilograms) per year for perhaps two hundred thousand recipients, the state would have furnished 12 million *modii* per year. Value at the source may have been in the low tens of millions but by the time the grain was distributed in the capital its value might have risen into high eight figures.³³ This makes it difficult to price this item but if we take account of transportation and storage costs, which also had to be borne by the state, an effective annual cost of well in excess of 50 million sesterces seems plausible. In the third century CE, provisions of oil, wine, and meat were added and grain was replaced by bread, raising costs further.

Games and the imperial court also made demands on public resources, but neither of them must be overrated. State grants to the organizers of major games in the capital ran in the hundreds of thousands rather than millions; satirical references to the cost of games, for what they are worth, fall in the same range; and the same is true of high-end gladiatorial shows in the provinces. The highest tally reported for a single occasion, 2 million sesterces, is ascribed to Hadrian before he became emperor. Military assets were involved in the capture of exotic animals, helping contain net cost. Most of the games in the empire were underwritten by local elites, and even in Rome itself senior officeholders were expected to contribute at what was perceived to be considerable personal expense.³⁴ Extravaganzas such as Trajan's 123-day shows in 107 CE were the exception, not the norm. It therefore seems unlikely that all state-sponsored public entertainment generated costs of more than in the low eight figures per year.

The costs of running the court may well have been considerable but any conjectures must be advanced in the context of our estimates for other types of discretionary

empire!), we would end up with a grand total of maybe 2.5 or 3 billion sesterces including grander projects in Rome and Athens and a number of new city foundations, or 120 to 140 million per reign-year, consistent with my upper-end estimate of 100 to 150 million sesterces per year for construction (see below). For the nature of public building in the third century CE, see now Rambaldi 2009, with Dey 2011 (showing an emphasis on fortifications, but without any evidence for how these projects were funded—state involvement cannot automatically be construed as full state funding). MacMullen 1959 draws attention to the contribution of military labor to imperial construction projects, which would have reduced net expenses.

31. Duncan-Jones 1994: 18.

32. Duncan-Jones 1994: 43; for gifts in general, see Millar 1977: 135–9, and cf. 491–506.

33. Rickman 1980: 120–97; Scheidel 2010b: 444.

34. Talbert 1984: 59–63; Hopkins and Beard 2005: 91.

spending, and should therefore also be put in the tens rather than hundreds of millions.

All in all, a conservative estimate might envision less than 600 million sesterces in annual military spending, 120 million in salaries and handouts, and perhaps 250 million in all other combined expenses, for a total of a little under 1 billion. A high-end “guesstimate” would assign 700 million to the military, 200 million to salaries, handouts, and the dole, 100 or 150 million to construction, and another 100 or 150 million to other discretionary spending, for a total of 1.1 or 1.2 billion sesterces.

This reconstruction is reinforced by consideration of the savings supposedly realized by emperors who did not engage in massive building projects in the capital: both Tiberius and Antoninus Pius are credited with saving around 100 million per year.³⁵ If this was the margin of savings for rulers who engaged neither in expensive military operations nor in massive metropolitan building projects, it is difficult to see how civilian discretionary spending, and resultant spending flexibility, could have been vastly greater than posited in the above estimates. It also deserves notice that the costs associated with rebuilding Rome after the fire of 65 CE triggered coin debasement, another indicator of limited slack in the system. All this suggests that income did not normally greatly exceed expenditure, which means that my estimate of expenditure of around a billion sesterces per year may serve as a rough proxy of aggregate revenue, at least for the period of relative stability up to the late second century CE.³⁶

This, in turn, allows us to explore the distribution of state revenue, especially the balance between direct taxes or tribute (on assets and persons) and other sources of income.³⁷ Collection regimes were heterogeneous, and some communities enjoyed immunity from tribute, most notably Italy as a whole. For various provinces, direct taxes in the form of tribute are reported at levels from one-seventh to one-fifth of farm output, in kind or in cash and assessed based on the size and type of land. An annual tax of 1 percent of assessed value is reported for Syria and Cilicia, which assuming a net yield on capital of 5 to 6 percent would equal a tax of one-sixth to one-fifth on net income. Lower rates in the form of tithes are known for various areas in the late republican period, although their

35. Suetonius, *Caligula* 37.3; Dio Cassius 74.8.3. I hasten to add that these figures in both cases derive from a total of 2.7 billion, a highly stylized figure (= $3 \times 3 \times 300$ million, Scheidel 1996), but here I am merely interested in orders of magnitude.

36. This estimate is likewise very broadly consistent with what little we can say about Roman state revenue in the sixth century CE: prior to the conquests of Justinian, total income from an area which four centuries earlier may have contained a little over one-third of the imperial population (Scheidel 2007a: 48) may have been of the order of 5 million *solidi* or 1.3 million tons of wheat equivalent (conjectured from the data in Jones 1964: 463–4, using official gold-grain commutation rates), close to one-half of a second-century CE revenue total of less than 1 to 1.2 billion sesterces or 2.5 to 3 million tons of wheat equivalent. Assuming somewhat higher economic development in the eastern Mediterranean and fairly inflexible effective (as opposed to nominal) tax rates, this apparent (if admittedly very shaky) convergence provides a measure of comfort.

37. For taxes in the early monarchy, see, e.g., Neesen 1980, with Brunt 1981; Rathbone 1996. On the later empire, see Jones 1964: 411–69; Bransbourg 2010.

continuation under the monarchy is uncertain.³⁸ It is only in Egypt that we have more precise information. Tax on private grain land seems to have been around one-eighth or one-tenth of output but higher (30 to 40 percent) for public land. Poll taxes varied considerably depending on location and status.³⁹

In the most general terms, these nominal liabilities translate to very large overall revenue. Even if agrarian production is put at not more than half of GDP, a 10 percent tax rate would yield at least three-quarters of a billion sesterces, or 60 to 80 percent of total state expenditure.⁴⁰ Overall rates of 15 or 20 percent would yield correspondingly more. The contrast with land taxes in China, at one-thirtieth of output as noted above, is striking.

The notion that direct taxation did in fact generate revenue on this scale conflicts with the great importance of other sources of state income. Indirect taxes include internal tolls (*portoria*, at rates of 2, 2.5, and 5 percent) and border tolls (of 25 percent in the East), as well as a more obscure toll for the city of Rome itself.⁴¹ The fiscal contribution of the internal tolls was probably relatively modest: for domestic *portoria* to generate 100 million sesterces in revenue, between 2 and 5 billion sesterces' worth of goods had to be traded interregionally every year, or 10 to 25 percent of total GDP, a high rate in an agrarian economy where much output was either consumed domestically or traded locally. The import toll held greater promise: a single ship laden with goods from India carried cargo assessed at some 7 million sesterces including a tax of 1.4 million.⁴² How many ships like this would have entered the empire in a year? Our imagination is constrained in the first instance by the likely size of the markets for these luxury items. According to my own rough projection, some 30 percent of GDP may have been available as disposable income that could have been used to acquire goods such as these, creating a potential market of up to 6 billion sesterces.⁴³ If one-tenth of this income had been spent on imports from Arabia and India, this demand would have supported eighty-five shiploads worth 7 million each; at one-quarter, over two hundred. This is an exceedingly crude exercise but one that shows that we cannot easily reckon with many hundreds of ships because the overall market, however substantial, was limited.⁴⁴

38. Hyginus 205L, with Neesen 1980: 44–8; Duncan-Jones 1990: 187–90.

39. Duncan-Jones 1990: 47–55 for a quick and deliberately (over)schematic survey. If, but only if, public land amounted to around one-third of all farm land, the overall tax rate would have been of the order of 20 percent or greater (48). For the shift to private land in the Roman period see now Monson 2012.

40. For a Roman imperial GDP size of close to 20 billion sesterces, see Scheidel and Friesen 2009: 74. The share of subsistence income in GDP was probably more than 50 percent, most of which would have been agrarian output: 89. My calculation in the text is based on a GDP of 18 billion and a tax immunity rate of 15 percent, mostly in Italy.

41. Duncan-Jones 1990: 194–5; and De Laet 1949: 345–50 for the *octroi* of Rome.

42. See, e.g., Rathbone 2001 (on *Papyrus Vindobonensis* G 40822).

43. Scheidel and Friesen 2009: 89. On the market for these goods, see most recently McLaughlin 2010: 141–55.

44. Modern speculations tend to range from high to extravagant. Rathbone 2001: 48–9 thinks the value of the Indian Ocean trade could have reached 1.4 billion sesterces while McLaughlin 2010: 164 estimates trade at 1.2 billion and toll income at 300 million; both come close to my “25 percent scenario.” Sidebotham's 2011: 218 “probably minimum” (!) conjecture of close to 18 billion in trade volume per year equals the entire GDP of the Roman Empire

Even so, one hundred ships could have produced some 140 million sesterces in revenue even before internal tolls are taken into account, and an even higher total cannot be ruled out. Overall toll revenue from all sources of over 100 million seems highly likely and a total of up to 200 million need not be unrealistic.

The yield of an inheritance tax of 5 percent imposed on Roman citizens is impossible to quantify due to various exemptions for relatives and other groups of beneficiaries.⁴⁵ The official version that the tax was meant to fund veteran bonuses is not particularly enlightening because we do not know how well this link worked in practice and which veterans received bonuses. Demand may have ranged from 40 to 100 million per year, and a tax yield in low eight figures is not implausible.⁴⁶

Slaves were taxed at 4 percent at sale and 5 percent at manumission.⁴⁷ If there were 7 million slaves worth 1,000 sesterces each and 5 percent of them changed hands every year, this would have yielded 14 million sesterces; at a higher turnover rate or a (probably more realistic) higher mean price, revenue could have been in the tens of millions.⁴⁸ Manumission taxes may have yielded comparable amounts, even though informal manumission practices would have cut into revenue.⁴⁹ I leave aside assorted smaller taxes as well as ad hoc exactions such as the *aurum coronarium*, which probably had little effect on mean revenue. Remarkably, however, the state could claim to have taken in 20 or 30 million sesterces a year merely from a (high) tax on the sale of gladiators.⁵⁰ Even if taken *cum grano salis*, this claim (meant to emphasize the generosity expressed by this tax's abolition) suggests that seemingly marginal levies had the potential to add significantly to income (in this case, if true, maybe 2 percent of total revenue).

Additional revenue accrued from mineral extraction and imperial domains. Precious metal mines in particular reportedly yielded great profit. Gold mines in

and highlights the need to contextualize our guesses in order to curtail fantasies. (At the opposite end of the spectrum, Young 2001: 210 misuses Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 12.41, to conjecture toll revenue in the mere tens of millions.) If we blithely took the one attested shipload as the default, the 120 ships involved in the Indian Ocean trade mentioned by Strabo 2.5.12 would have brought in 840 million worth of imports or 14 percent of disposable income (and some 170 million in toll income not counting tax on capital outflows and minor tolls on the same imports, for which see Young 2001: 209), perhaps a more plausible guess but equally shaky given the relatively early date of his statement and most importantly our ignorance about mean load values.

45. Günther 2008: 23–94.

46. If in the second century CE Romans represented, say, 20–25 percent of the empire's population and owned a third or half of all assets and assets were worth ten times GDP and annual turnover was 3–4 percent and taxable legacies equaled one-quarter of all estates, liabilities would have been 25 to 50 million sesterces per year and actual yield presumably less. Despite the many “ands” required for my conjecture, this at least suggests that the tax could in principle have made a significant contribution to legionary discharge bonuses. Historians who disapprove of such numbers games may prefer to take Caracalla's interest in this tax seriously (Dio Cassius 77.9.4), for the same result.

47. Günther 2008: 95–126, 149–54.

48. On the number of slaves, see Scheidel 2011b: 292 (10 percent of the total population?); on slave prices, see Scheidel 2005.

49. On possible manumission rates, see Scheidel 1997: 160–6.

50. According to the *Senatus Consultum de pretiis gladiatoribus minuendis* of 177 ce: see most recently Carter 2003.

northern Spain were said to produce 20,000 pounds, or 6.5 tons (equivalent to 88 million sesterces), and a mine in Bosnia produced 50 pounds per day, or 5.9 tons (80 million sesterces) per year. In the second century CE, Dacia also contributed on an unknown but presumably similarly substantial scale. Silver mines in Spain, one of which had supposedly generated 300 pounds of silver per day (35.4 tons or 44 million sesterces) in the third century BCE, were still being exploited in the first century CE, albeit with unknown results. Just these three figures combined would produce an annual total of over 200 million sesterces.⁵¹ Unfortunately, we cannot tell whether such tallies accurately reflect conditions under the empire and, more importantly, if they are meant to represent total output or the state's share: the latter seems plausible but is not certain.⁵² To this we may add lesser mines, marble quarries, and so forth.⁵³ This means that mineral wealth alone might have covered a sizable share of total expenditure, perhaps anywhere from a tenth to a quarter.⁵⁴ Domain income was a function of the size of imperial holdings, which is unknown but presumably kept expanding and arguably amounted to a multiple of the estates of the richest private individuals, which are said to have reached low nine figures. If valued at a billion or two, imperial estates could have produced 50 or 100 million sesterces in annual net revenue.⁵⁵

A final category, legacies to the emperor, may have offset gifts, and in fact may often have been intended to do so. The experience of Augustus, who claimed to have received 1.4 billion sesterces in legacies over twenty years, indicates that this was by no means a trivial source of income.⁵⁶ The incidence of confiscations fluctuated over time but at least periodically may have been of genuine fiscal significance.⁵⁷ A long-term average in the high eight figures for both categories combined seems a distinct possibility.

All this adds up to an intriguing picture. The margins of error are considerable, and in many cases enforcement problems and graft were bound to take their toll, but it seems unlikely that all these estimates are consistently wide of the mark and greatly overstate actual revenue: in particular, what appears to have

51. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33.67, 33.78, and 33.97; Edmondson 1989: 88–9; Harl 1996: 81–2 (who misrepresents the evidence). See more generally Bransbourg 2011: 120–1.

52. Edmondson 1989: 88 and Harl 1996: 81 consider two of these tallies to be state revenue. Cf. also Bransbourg 2011: 121.

53. The gold mines of the Rio Duerno alone, not included in the above counts, are estimated to have produced 3 tons of gold (or 40 million sesterces) per year for a period of 130 years (Domergue and Hérail 1978: 278). For the organization of mining and quarrying, see now Hirt 2010. Mining yields declined in late antiquity: e.g., see Edmondson 1989.

54. Say, 100 million sesterces if the reported figures represent a ceiling and a 50 percent state share (as in the Roman mining ordinances of Vipasca); 250 million or more if the sources specify state revenue and empire-wide output was higher than in these samples (see the previous note). In this context, it merits attention that even a single lead mine could generate between 200,000 and 400,000 sesterces of revenue for the state (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 34.165).

55. Duncan-Jones 1982: 132–3 (returns), 343–4 (fortunes). On domains, see Millar 1977: 175–89.

56. Suetonius, *Augustus* 101. See Millar 1977: 153–8 for emperors' inheritances.

57. Millar 1977: 163–74. Burgers 1993: 65 observes that the 35 senators and 321 knights reportedly executed by Claudius might well have generated revenue in excess of 800 million sesterces (or 60 million per year).

been the biggest revenue streams—from import tolls, mining, and domain income—would have been relatively easy to control by the state. If we tally up these estimates we arrive at a total in the hundreds of millions. In view of the above survey, it seems difficult to me to assume a net total of much less than half a billion sesterces, and the actual figure could have been even higher.⁵⁸

At half a billion, these sources of income would have covered half or close to half of state spending. This is striking because in theory, direct taxes, had they reached the central government to the extent to which they were nominally due, would already have covered all required expenditure all by themselves. There are several ways to explain this discrepancy. (1) Overall state spending might have been higher. However, in order to make a real difference, it would have had to be dramatically higher than estimated above, which is inconsistent with what we know about outcomes.⁵⁹ (2) Indirect taxes and mining and domain income totaled only a small fraction of the estimated amounts, which is once again incompatible with the record, the significance assigned to them by the state, and the small amount of effort required to capture most of these dues. (3) This leaves a final option, which is that only a relatively modest proportion of all direct taxes that were nominally due were actually collected or reached the central government. Amnesties such as Hadrian's celebrated remission of supposedly 900 million sesterces in back taxes may merely have been the tip of an iceberg of foregone state income resulting from concealment of taxable assets, failure to pay, and rent-seeking behavior by agents.⁶⁰

4. DISTRIBUTIONAL COMPARISONS

4.1. *Sources of Revenue*

How do Roman state finances in the second century CE compare to Han finances in the first century BCE? Roman revenue of between 1 and 1.3 billion sesterces

58. Using tallies of 100 to 200 million for tolls, 25 to 50 million for estate taxes, 40 to 60 million for slave-related taxes, 100 to 250 million for mining and quarrying, 100 to 200 million for domains, and 50 to 100 million for inheritances and expropriations and disregarding minor levies, for a total of at least 400 million and possibly as much as 800 million sesterces per year. The computational mean of 600 million would allow for 17 percent loss to graft and still yield half a billion net.

59. An annual total of 2 billion sesterces in state spending and saving would have absorbed 400 to 800 million in indirect taxes and domain income and 1.2 to 1.6 billion of direct taxes, the latter equivalent to around 15 percent of one-half of GDP. This scenario would require additional spending equivalent to that of the entire Roman army, for which there is no plausible outlet. (Provincial construction seems the only even theoretically conceivable candidate, for which see above, nn. 27–30.) This implies that effective income from direct taxes had to fall short of nominal rates.

60. Dio Cassius 69.8.1 (118 CE) (though this is probably merely yet another symbolic figure; see Scheidel 1996), and see MacMullen 1987: 739–42, 749, 750, and 752; Duncan-Jones 1994: 60 for further remissions and temporary tax relief throughout the empire. This meshes with documentary evidence of substantial tax arrears (MacMullen 1987: 740, 753). Local elites, who would have held much of the taxable wealth, appear to have been crucial in assessing assets, with unsurprising consequences for net state income. For the grand bargain between military dictatorship and local elites, see below, §5, and in more detail Scheidel forthcoming d.

translates to around 2.6 to 3.5 million tons of wheat equivalent whereas Han revenue of 10 to 12 billion cash equals 2.1 to 3.7 million tons of wheat equivalent.⁶¹ Adjusted for population (putting Han China's at 60 million and Rome's at 70 million), annual per capita revenue stood at 37 to 50 kilograms in the Roman Empire and 35 to 62 kilograms in the Han Empire, effectively the same rates. This is not surprising given that economic development must have been very broadly similar in both environments. Although Roman GDP might well have been somewhat higher in capita terms, the Han state share of GDP was not constrained by municipal taxes as in the Rome world.⁶² In any case the margins of uncertainty are so wide that neither one of these factors would make a real difference here. Moreover, in both cases, compulsory labor services are not included in the estimates, despite their undoubted significance.⁶³

However, this fundamental similarity conceals considerable differences in the distribution of both revenue and expenditure.⁶⁴ In the case of the Han Empire the evidence does not allow us to be sure that direct taxation was of paramount importance, at least in the Western Han period before evasion by local elites undermined the system, as under the Eastern Han Dynasty; but the general assumption appears probable. In the case of the Roman Empire during the first few centuries of the monarchy, the evidence is less poor and on balance supports a model of considerable reliance on income from sources other than tribute. If this impression is indeed correct, it suggests that the Roman authorities chose the path of least resistance by focusing on revenue sources that were easily controlled: imperial domains, mines and quarries, customs dues that targeted the wealthy (who sustained demand for exotic imports and interregionally traded goods), and taxes that had the same effect in homing in on upper-class legacies (however constrained by traditional emphasis on close kin)⁶⁵ and the

61. Using 2.5 sesterces per *modius* or 2.6–2.7 kilograms of wheat per sestertius (Scheidel and Friesen 2009: 73–4) and 50–75 cash per *hu* or .21–.31 kilograms per cash. For Roman revenue (see above), adding 100 million in savings to the high-end spending estimate would create a maximum of 1.3 billion in revenue. In the Han case, savings also have to be taken into account (see above, n. 9) but since the estimate is built from income this would not affect the overall total.

62. Cf. Morris 2010: 281 for slightly higher social development in Rome than in Han China. The Roman case resembles the more developed Song period (332). My Roman state revenue estimate approximates 5 to 7 percent of GDP (coincidentally the same rate as for Hopkins's 2002: 201 somewhat lower revenue and GDP estimates). Zuijderhoek 2009: 37–52 conjectures municipal income of the order of 3 percent of GDP, for a total public sector share of 8 to 10 percent (to which we would need to add a further margin for spoiled tax in kind and any revenue collected but not passed on to the central authorities, plus the value of compulsory services, for a total public sector share somewhat in excess of 10 percent). Cf. Lewis forthcoming for a guesstimate of a 10 percent tax take from Han peasant output.

63. On Han, see, e.g., Nishijima 1986: 599 (corvée); Barbieri-Low 2007: 212–56 (corvée and convict labor). On Rome, see, e.g., Millar 1984a (convict labor); Scheidel 1991: 149–53 (irregular exactions from lower classes); Drecoll 1997 (routine elite "liturgies").

64. I skip here the question of the monetization of tax revenue, which is not immediately germane to this discussion. In Donghai about 90 percent of revenue was monetized (see above, and also Scheidel 2009d: 204 n. 310). The debate concerning Rome continues (e.g., Duncan-Jones 1990: 187–98; Hopkins 2002: 215–8).

65. Champlin 1991: 103–31.

market in slaves. All these arrangements had the net effect of capturing surplus at lower unit costs and with less friction than those involved in the pursuit of tribute.⁶⁶

As I argue elsewhere, this arrangement is best understood as a key element of a—tacit but no less effective—grand bargain between state rulers and local elites that gave the latter ample leeway in protecting their own interests and skimming off surplus at the local level but nevertheless generated sufficient revenue to support a bloated military, senior associates, and the metropolitan populace, the three major constituencies of the winning coalition of the Caesarean-Augustan system of ostensibly civilianized military dictatorship. It was only when income from some sources contracted just as demand for revenue rose that rulers sought to renegotiate these arrangements by putting grater pressure on fixed assets, albeit without much success in the long run.⁶⁷

4.2. Agency Costs

What was state revenue spent on? Leading up to an overall breakdown at the end of this section, I focus first on expenditure on administrative agents and the military, the two most crucial supports of any “fiscal skeleton” and the only areas that allow detailed comparison between the two empires. Formal outlays on state administration are particularly well documented for the early Eastern Han period, several generations later than the evidence for revenue discussed so far.⁶⁸ As there is no compelling reason to assume that either state income or civil service salaries differed dramatically between the first century BCE and the first century CE, for the limited purpose of this survey data from these two periods will be used side by side. The number of salaried officials and clerks appears to have been similar in both periods: in 5 BCE, the central and provincial administration reportedly employed some 130,000 officials, compared to an estimate of 153,000 for the Eastern Han Empire.⁶⁹

66. Bang 2008: 214 rightly regards heavy import tolls as an example of opportunistic fiscal parasitism. Roman tax collection was probably also skewed in geographic terms, favoring the western Mediterranean. Egypt, with maybe one-tenth or less of the empire’s population, can reasonably be supposed to have produced some 200 million sesterces in direct taxes (see Duncan-Jones 1990: 53). Plutarch’s (*Pompey* 45) reference to a 70 percent increase in revenues thanks to (limited) Roman expansion in the Levant is telling. We cannot say how much the western regions of the empire caught up over time, but Italy’s immunity from tribute and the concentration of toll income in the East would have ensured massive imbalances for centuries. In view of how the empire eventually unraveled it is tempting to consider the impact of different effective tax rates relevant on the long-term prospects of the western and eastern parts of the empire, next to other features such as overall development, geography, and ecology.

67. See Scheidel forthcoming d and Bransbourg forthcoming. This is an example of a “low-tax” or “secure state” regime that avoids overly intrusive measures, for which see Monson and Scheidel forthcoming more generally. For the later Roman Empire, see Bransbourg 2010.

68. For all the salary data used in the following, unless otherwise noted, see Bielenstein 1980: 125–31.

69. Loewe 2004: 70–1. Extrapolating from staffing levels in Donghai Commandery, Loewe estimates that close to 100,000 of the 130,000 officials at the end of the late Western Han period worked outside the capital. An alternative extrapolation that takes account of population numbers suggests a slightly lower total: if that commandery housed 2.5 percent of the population, its 2,200 officials may also have accounted for a similar share of all provincial officials, for a provincial total of closer to 90,000. See also Zhao, chapter 3 in this volume.

The most complete extant salary list, for the year 50 CE, records salary ranks corresponding to monthly compensation from 350 *hu* or 5.5 tons of unhusked grain at the very top to 8 *hu* or 125 kilograms at the very bottom of the pay scale. Total expenditure evidently depended on the relative distribution of pay ranks. A detailed breakdown refers to the staff of the commandery that included the new capital Luoyang and was therefore atypically large. It lists 892 officials, most of them at junior ranks: 262 clerks receiving 192 *hu* (3 tons, equivalent to 19,200 cash at an elevated metropolitan valuation of 100 cash per *hu*) per year, 50 accessory clerks at half as much, and 231 capable junior clerks, presumably at a similar level, plus 230 patrolmen who, if they were paid like soldiers at the frontier (a conjecture unlikely to be wide of the mark), might have received the equivalent of some 8,000 cash (or 1,250 kilograms) per year. It is hard to see how this group, which accounted for 87 percent of the overall staff, could cumulatively have earned more than 10 million cash equivalent (or 1,600 tons of grain) per year, or perhaps close to 15 million (or 2,300 tons) if higher ranks are included. If we extrapolate from these values to 130,000 or 150,000 officials overall, we obtain 350,000 to 400,000 tons of grain equivalent per year, or approximately 1.4 to 2.1 billion a cash.⁷⁰ Metropolitan officials also regularly received gifts, which, if put at 50 percent of base pay, would raise total expenses by only a few hundred million cash.

A check on this estimate is provided by the breakdown for the prefectural staff for Luoyang, comprising 796 men. Again, most of them were of junior rank, with the highest member commanding 9.5 tons or 60,000 cash equivalent per year and probably more than 700 clerks ranked within a bracket of around 1,250 to 2,000 kilograms or 8,000 to 13,000 cash. The same rough extrapolation as before suggests 250,000 to 300,000 tons in grain equivalent, or between 1 and 1.8 billion in cash equivalent and a couple hundred million more with gifts.

At the prefectural level, heads received between 7.5 and 17 tons (or 24,000 to 81,000 cash equivalent at lower provincial grain prices), depending on the size of their counties, and their assistants 5.5 to 9.5 tons (or 18,000 to 45,000 cash).⁷¹ The provincial leadership consequently earned more than 16,000 tons and less than 32,000 tons (or between 50 million and 150 million) per year in the Eastern Han period (or maybe a third more under the Western Han, controlling for the greater number of prefectures and assuming constant pay, although actual pay may have been lower).

The most highly remunerated officials operated in the center. In the Western Han period, the most senior official, the chancellor, made 720,000 cash (or 112 tons) per year, while the heads of the 100 or so commanderies made 144,000 cash (22.5 tons) per year.⁷² In the Eastern Han period, the three excellencies earned 420,000

70. Using a grain valuation of 100 cash per *hu* for one-quarter of officials (see the previous note) and of 50–75 cash per *hu* for the others.

71. Bielenstein 1980: 101.

72. For the latter, see Bielenstein 1980: 93, with 125. Here and in the following I follow Bielenstein's nomenclature for Han officials.

cash (65.5 tons) per year and perhaps as much again in regular gifts, for a total of 2.5 million for the entire group. The nine ministers were entitled to 216,000 cash (33.5 tons) each and perhaps half as much again in gifts, for a total of 3 million. Yet even their immediate subordinates were much more junior. The Ministry of Agriculture, a key agency, disposed of two assistants (at 108,000 and 64,800 cash) and a staff of 164 that included 16 officials paid 36,000, 20 at 19,200, 9 at 13,200, 25 at 9,600, and no fewer than 75 apprentices, who must have received (even) lower compensation than the ranked officials. Overall, this high-powered agency cannot have absorbed much more than 2 million (310 tons) in base pay or perhaps 3 million (470 tons) including gifts. In this case, excluding the most elite functionaries, extrapolation to 130,000 or 150,000 officials would yield a tally of around 220,000 or 260,000 tons, or .9 to 1.4 billion cash equivalent per year (without gifts).

These overlapping extrapolations suggest that the late Western Han state may have spent around 300,000 or at most 400,000 tons a year on officials, equivalent to anywhere from 1.2 to 2.1 billion cash. The higher end of this range reminds us of the claim in the *Xinlun* that 2 billion was spent on the salaries of officials. Whether this is a convincing reason to salvage this particular element of the text is not for me to say.

For much of the Roman Empire, during the Republic and for the first three centuries of the monarchy, the civilian state administration was much smaller in size than that of the mature Han Empire. Conversely, senior Roman officials were much better remunerated than their Han counterparts. In best Han fashion, Roman equestrian officials were ranked in salary classes, from the *sexagenarius* making 60,000 sesterces or 10,000 to 20,000 *modii* (67–134 tons) in wheat equivalent per year to the *trecenarius* (starting in the late second century CE) with five times as much. A *centenarius* (100,000 sesterces) would be in charge of the finances of a province, a *ducenarius* (200,000 sesterces) in charge of the finances of a major province or serving as the governor of a small province. A *sexagenarius* would oversee the collection of certain taxes, conduct censuses, or manage public works or imperial domains. In terms of function and seniority, the Han equivalent of a Roman *sexagenarius* (at around 100 tons) might be a prefect in charge of the office of salt (or iron), ranked at 600 or 1,000 *shi* (13–17 tons). A *centenarius* (100–200 tons) resembled a commandery assistant at 600 *shi* (13 tons), and a *ducenarius* (200–400 tons) was equivalent to a commandery head at 2,000 *shi* (22 tons). We can see that Roman officials received considerable multiples of the pay due to functionally comparable Han administrators. As a consequence, 136 Roman equestrian officials in 192 CE absorbed some 15.4 million sesterces per year, or 15,000 to 30,000 tons of wheat equivalent.⁷³

Members of the senatorial order who enjoyed stints as governors or legionary commanders appear to have been even more lavishly compensated: Roman notions of hierarchical differentiation called for recognition of the top order of the

73. Duncan-Jones 1994: 37–9 (also for the following paragraph).

ruling class, and an isolated reference to 1 million sesterces (1,000–2,000 tons) for a top governorship in the early third century CE supports this intuition. We are reduced to guesswork regarding the finer points of senatorial compensation, but Duncan-Jones plausibly reckons with an annual total of 43.5 million sesterces (45,000–90,000 tons) for a mere 73 senatorial governors and generals. This implies a scenario in which 209 top officials received almost 60 million sesterces per year, which translates to 60,000–120,000 tons of wheat equivalent, corresponding to something like 15 to 40 percent of total Han spending on well over 100,000 officials. Even allowing for some margin of error in the case of Roman senators, it is clear that top officials were dramatically better compensated by the Roman emperor than by his Han counterpart. The reason for this must be sought in the political structure. In imperial Rome, generous pay reflects a long-standing legacy of aristocratic privilege and oligarchic control, deeply rooted in a time when the empire had been set up to a large extent as the personal hunting ground of a smallish set of political, military, and religious leaders, and expensively maintained by the endemic insecurities of the new monarchical rulers. Han China, by contrast, rested on the Warring States tradition that had overcome the autonomy of feudal confederates and struggled to create a loyal and dependent class of officials serving the state (see Zhao, chapter 3 in this volume).

At the same time, there can be no doubt that overall the Roman state, at any time of the monarchical regime, spent far less in real terms on civilian administration than the mature Han state. Duncan-Jones's estimate of 75 million sesterces in civilian salary costs translates to 80,000 to 170,000 tons of wheat equivalent, compared to perhaps 300,000 tons or more in China. The 15 million his estimate allows for junior ranks could have supported 6,000 subordinates at twice the legionary base pay.⁷⁴ Actual numbers might have been smaller but costs higher given that companions of governors also received compensation and imperial freedmen occasionally commanded high salaries.⁷⁵ Yet while we might choose to double or triple outlay for subelite officials to bring the total closer to 100 million sesterces, or 100,000 to 200,000 tons of wheat equivalent, we also need to consider constraints arising from the fact that governors were accompanied by deputized soldiers, who were already covered by military budget spending, and that many subordinates were imperial slaves. Moreover, we also need to take account of the costs for Han slaves that are not included in the previous estimates but may very well have been sizable: a claim of 100,000 or more slaves in government employ, absorbing 500 or 600 million cash (at least 100,000 tons)

74. Numbers are unknown: cf., e.g., Garnsey and Humfress 2001: 36 (2,000 imperial slaves and freedmen); Kelly 2004: 111 (up to 10,000 slaves and seconded soldiers); Alföldy 2011: 210 (10,000 for the entire imperial administration).

75. Note the case of a freedman *proximus* in the central administration in Rome with a salary of 40,000 sesterces (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.8619), and cf. the imperial slave in charge of revenue from Gaul who was endowed with 15 subslaves (6.5197).

a year, may well be hyperbole, but at least points to substantial slave use in the public sector.⁷⁶ It is therefore unfeasible to invoke the costs of Roman imperial slaves in order to raise overall outlays closer to Han levels. In the roughest terms, Han spending on civilian administrators was probably not less than twice and possibly as much as three times as high as relevant Roman expenditure.⁷⁷

This overall picture remained unchanged in late antiquity. Detailed salary information for the later Roman Empire is not available until the sixth century CE. Despite intervening sweeping reorganizations, salaries of senior officials remained high. What must have been a top-paid official, the praetorian prefect of Africa, received 100 pounds of gold per year, close to 2,000 tons at the official commutation rate or maybe half in local real terms, more than the three excellencies of the Eastern Han state earned together. Salaries of governors ranged from 400 to 2,880 gold *solidi* (anywhere from 50 to 770 tons) depending on rank, well ahead of Han governors' salaries.⁷⁸

Junior pay grades are known mostly from Justinian's reestablishment of the praetorian prefecture of Africa in 534 CE. His decree lists a staff of 396 officials for the prefect's office. 70 percent of them were classified at the base pay grade of 9 *solidi* per year, equivalent to a cavalryman's pay or up to 2,400 kilograms of wheat equivalent at official commutation rates. The four most senior officials (the heads of the four *scrinia*, or bureaus) made 46 *solidi* (up to 12 tons) and the 96 others between 11.5 and 23 *solidi* (up to 3 or 6 tons) per year. This resembles the Eastern Han pay grades from accessory clerks to officials ranked at 200 *shi*, such as the assistants to heads of small prefectures. In terms of both pay levels and pay distribution, the makeup of Roman offices broadly resembles that of the Han offices described above.⁷⁹

However, it appears that this document conceals much lower pay averages overall. The 396 officials in the African prefectural office—a very high-level administrative unit—received 4,172 *solidi* per year, or 10.5 *solidi* per capita, and the staff of the corresponding ducal office (managing military affairs) averaged 15.5 *solidi*. Yet reported pay rates for other provincial staff were much lower: in several provincial offices, staff income averaged between 3.6 and 4.5 *solidi*, or around one ton, and even lower averages are attested, such as 1,000 *solidi* for 600 officials in Egypt, likewise under Justinian.⁸⁰

76. Wilbur 1943: 114, 176, 397 on a memorial dated to 44 BCE. The rhetorical character of the passage in question strongly suggests exaggeration, as does the alleged presence of over 100,000 convicts, conscripts, and officials involved in mining and smelting mentioned in the same memorial: see Scheidel forthcoming c. Yet for what it is worth, the averred cost credibly approximates subsistence income.

77. At 100,000 to 200,000 tons in Rome and 300,000 to 400,000 tons (or even more including slaves) in Han.

78. Jones 1964: 397–8; cf. Kelly 2004: 65 (720–1,440 *solidi* per year for governors from 535–6 CE).

79. Jones 1964: 590–1, and cf. 598 for average pay at the 9 *solidi* level in an earlier ducal office, and 446 for commutation rates. A strong preponderance of basic pay grades (albeit without salary information) is also found in the office of the *comes sacrarum largitionum* in 384 CE, where 312 of 446 officials, or 70 percent, belonged to junior ranks: see Jones 1964: 583–4.

80. Jones 1964: 593–4, 599.

Given these discrepancies, it seems inadvisable to extrapolate from the prefectural data to the (earlier) empire overall. In theory, if 396 officials earned 4,172 *solidi* per year, 30,000 or 35,000 of them could have made some 316,000 to 369,000 *solidi* or 40,000 to 100,000 tons, excluding the most senior ranks. However, if actual mean base pay was lower for provincial staff, overall totals for subordinates would likewise have fallen short even of these fairly modest levels unless palatine pay levels at the imperial centers were sufficiently higher to offset this. If we rather generously add up to 200,000 *solidi* for governors and generals and as much again for top officials, we reach the equivalent of 100,000 to 200,000 tons of wheat equivalent, the same range as a generous estimate for the second century CE and markedly less than the Han amount of 300,000 tons or more.

This may seem surprising, considering the familiar notion that “bureaucracy” expanded in the later Roman Empire. But while it did so numerically, in terms of staffing, moderate contraction of compensation at the senior level appears to have stabilized overall outlays. Exploiting the corrosion of established aristocratic privilege, the late Roman state cut compensation at the senior level while employing tens of thousands of junior officials at often trivial wages. Protobureaucratization was achieved by reallocating resources from symbolic viceroys to lower-level agents who were disproportionately clustered in the main centers of power, and by externalizing the cost of civil service by effectively requiring subjects to sustain officials through direct payment for services.⁸¹

The Roman state thus moved from extravagant compensation at the senior level and relatively small civilian staffs to more moderate senior compensation at the provincial level and larger junior staffs whose funding was in effect largely privatized. The Han system, by contrast, had always curtailed senior incomes and instead furnished a very large number of junior officials with a living wage. As a result, wage compression was and remained much more pronounced in Han China than in Rome. In the sixth century CE, a praetorian prefect, at 100 pounds of gold per year, would receive at least 800 times the nominal basic stipend of an entry-level official of 9 *solidi*, and several thousand times the actual stipends that are attested for this period. By contrast, a top Han official, even with gifts, would only make less than 100 times the stipend of a lowly accessory clerk.

The data gathered in table 1 demonstrate that senior Roman officials and all members of the Roman military were better paid than their Han counterparts. Existing information enables us to compare official salaries and military stipends at least for select ranks: even allowing for significant margins of error, the

81. On protobureaucratization, see Eich, chapter 4 in this volume. For fee paying and extortion, see Jones 1964: 399–401, 467–8, 496–9, 591, and 605; Kelly 2004: 64–8. Jones 1964: 399 tellingly estimates that the purchase price of a governorship equaled twice the annual salary.

Table 1. Annual Salaries of Civilian and Military Personnel
(Expressed in Metric Tons of Grain)

	Rome	Han	Rome Multiple (Han = 1)
<i>Top officials</i>			
Chancellor (1st c. BCE)		110 (+ gifts?)	
Three excellencies (1st–2nd c. CE)		65 (?130 with gifts)	
Consular governor (early 3rd c. CE)	1,000–2,000		8–18
Praetorian prefect (6th c. CE)	1,000–2,000		8–18
<i>Very senior officials</i>			
Nine ministers (1st–2nd c. CE)		35 (?50 with gifts)	
Trecenarian procurator (2nd c. CE)	335–670		7–14
Ducenarian procurator (2nd c. CE)	225–450		5–9
<i>Provincial governors</i>			
Grand administrator (1st–2nd c. CE)		23 (?gifts)	
Prefect of Egypt (6th c. CE)	320–650		(<)14–28
Centenarian procurator (2nd c. CE)	110–220		(<)5–10
Governor (5th c. CE)	50–100		(<)2–4
<i>Regional administrators</i>			
Prefect (1st–2nd c. CE)		16	
<i>Junior officials</i>			
Accessory clerk (1st–2nd c. CE)		1.5	
Scribe (6th c. CE)	1.2–2.4		.8–1.6
<i>Military ranks</i>			
Company commander (1st c. BCE)		6–11	
Centurion (2nd c. CE)	13–27		2–2.5
Garrison infantryman (1st c. BCE)		.6-.7+ (?)	
Legionary infantryman (2nd c. CE)	1.3–2.7		(<?) 2–5

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

	Rome	Hane	Rome Multiple (Han = 1)
<i>Wage multiples</i>			
Multiple of top official relative to infantryman	200–1,500	200	1–8
Multiple of top official relative to company commander	20–150	10–20	

Sources: Jones 1964; Bielenstein 1980; Duncan-Jones 1994: 37–8. The gifts for the three excellencies and nine ministers are documented. A *centurio* was in charge of eighty men, whereas a company commander (*houshi*) might command some one hundred to two hundred men (derived from Loewe 1967: vol. 1: 76). The base pay for Han infantrymen is based on a single adult man: however, family members were also allocated grain (Loewe 1967: vol. 1 93–4), which complicates comparison (especially as they may also have worked for a living).

observed discrepancies are consistent across different ranks and spheres of employment.⁸² In real terms, incomes of top officials were on average ten times higher in the Roman than in the Han Empire, with smaller gaps of around five times among more junior ranks.

This overview neglects two confounding variables: the role of irregular compensation and the difference between fiscal and social cost. The Han tradition conveys the impression that very senior officials were the beneficiaries of considerable imperial largesse.⁸³ Thus, a chancellor could be said to receive 10 million cash in gifts, or a grandee secretary who supposedly relied only on his salary and gifts was able to leave 5 million cash. Even if these are symbolic figures, they indicate gifts well beyond the standard salaries and annual supplementary allocations at the very top of the hierarchy. However, such benefits may well have been a function of close proximity to the ruler. The main question is to what extent this kind of largesse extended into the less exalted ranks of officialdom that cumulatively accounted for the bulk of pertinent state spending. When a fairly senior official ranked at 800 *shi* (ahead of most officials) received silks, cotton, clothes, wine, meat, and fruit from the emperor, we must wonder whether this was part of the regular allocation (which we can at least crudely quantify) or not. In any case, for the overwhelming majority of officials such gifts would not by themselves create noteworthy wealth.

The main mechanism for providing stable supplementary income to high-ranking officials was ennoblement, which entitled beneficiaries to a hereditary claim to some of the revenue from households that were put under their jurisdiction.

82. This despite the fact that this survey is biased in favor of Han officials because it includes gifts that may also have existed but cannot be quantified on the Roman side.

83. Collection of data in Ch'ü 1972: 89–94.

Reported tallies ranged from a few hundred to twenty-six thousand households.⁸⁴ Holders of nobilities collected tax from such households and rendered this to the central government. They were entitled to retain 200 cash per year and tributary household as their own emoluments.⁸⁵ Between 193 and 241 nobilities were said to exist near the end of the Western Han period. Assuming that the average number of households was in the low thousands, a typical noble would have received several hundred thousand cash per year. At one thousand to five thousand households per fief, the state would have lost between 40 million and 200 million cash per year, a small share of total state revenue as estimated above.

At the same time, an annual income even of 200,000 cash (for one thousand households) exceeds the pay of all but the top dozen Eastern Han state officials. We may conclude that ennoblement created a class of privileged beneficiaries of state largesse not entirely unlike those members of the senatorial class in Rome who received large handouts for occasional public service. However, even in this case, income levels probably still fell short of Roman tallies: a hypothetical chancellor endowed with 10,000 households on top of his salary and gift income would have received some 500 tons of grain equivalent, less than the *base* pay of all or at least some Roman senatorial governors or the most senior late Roman officials.

References to the great wealth of Han officials do not necessarily reflect the scale of official benefits. Several top officials are credited with large fortunes denominated in the tens or even hundreds of millions cash, which put them on a par with stereotypically denominated fortunes of the wealthiest entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, fortunes at the gubernatorial level that were considered noteworthy could range from hundreds of thousands to tens of millions cash.⁸⁶ In such cases, there is no good reason to seek their source primarily in state income rather than in a mixture of existing family wealth and more importantly the unofficial financial benefits of office. The latter is echoed in reports of tremendous wealth amassed by favorites of Roman emperors.⁸⁷

This is not the place to consider the social cost of these administrative systems. One would expect that at all levels, considerable income was derived from fees, gifts, and bribes solicited from state subjects (and subordinate fellow officials). While arguably a significant addition to the burden of the state on the economy, these practices did not directly affect state finances except insofar as they allowed the state to employ agents at low wages or in some cases even to have them purchase positions because informal income made government service attractive.⁸⁸

84. Loewe 2004: 284 and n. 17.

85. Swann 1950: 431–2; Loewe 2004: 286.

86. Ch'ü 1972: 93.

87. Duncan-Jones 1982: 343.

88. Repeated increases of Han junior wages (once explicitly to combat corruption) show some awareness of the problem: Bielenstein 1980: 125; cf. also Jones 1964: 397 on the later Roman Empire. See more generally section 7 of Eich's chapter in this volume, chapter 4.

While rent seeking explains the viability of low wages at subordinate levels, it is the gap between Han and Roman senior and more generally military incomes that catches the eye. As suggested earlier, high compensation for senior Roman officials owed much to a tradition of aristocratic dominance and regime vulnerability. The latter may be even more important in explaining the dramatic pay differentials between officers and privates in the Roman military, where officers functioned not only as military commanders but also as guarantors of troop loyalty. With its lack of stable dynasties and endless usurpations, the Roman imperial monarchy faced powerful incentives for targeting military commanders with largesse. Han rulers operated in a substantively different environment where up to the late second century CE senior agents or military officers did not normally pose a comparable threat to the ruling dynasty and its court.⁸⁹

4.3. *Protection Costs*

Detailed evidence for military spending is disproportionately concentrated in the first two centuries of the Roman imperial monarchy. In this period, my estimates suggest that the army accounted for slightly more than half of state spending. While much less is known about routine military costs in the Han Empire, it is clear that soldiers and especially their officers were relatively modestly compensated. For this reason, the Han Empire would have had to maintain a larger army than the Roman Empire in order to match the latter's military expenditure commitments. If a Han infantryman received 3 or 3.33 *hu* of grain, some salt, and possibly a few hundred cash per month, his overall cost to the state, even allowing for equipment, could not easily have exceeded the equivalent of 10,000 cash per year.⁹⁰ Officers might have absorbed perhaps half a million cash for every one hundred to two hundred men, and cavalry would also have necessitated higher outlays.⁹¹ The Han Empire would therefore have had to support a standing army in excess of half a million men in order to spend a little over half of state revenue of 10 to 12 billion cash on the military, or a force considerably larger than the Roman imperial army at probable second-century CE strength.

There is nothing to support this notion. Comparisons are made difficult not only by the lack of Han evidence but also by the greater numerical flexibility of the military of the Western Han period, when conscription still played an important role and effective troop strength may have waxed and waned according to demand. Following the shift to professional service under the Eastern Han Dynasty, conditions may have been more similar to those in the Roman Empire but numbers are even scarcer. Han troop strength is most liberally recorded for the great campaigns the emperor Wudi waged against the Xiongnu. Yet while these

89. For Roman exceptionalism in terms of dynastic discontinuity and violent turnover and the contrast with Chinese dynasties throughout history, see Scheidel in progress a.

90. Loewe 1967: vol. 1: 93–4 and vol. 2: 69–71; 2006: 64–5; Chang 2007b: 30.

91. Conjectured from Loewe 1967: vol. 1: 76, 96.

records have prompted elaborate quantitative reconstructions of military outlays in that period, the underlying numerical claims may well be colored by a historiographical tradition that was hostile to this military effort and therefore inflated its human and financial cost.⁹²

Later but more straightforward reports of war expenses are comparatively modest. A major twelve-year war against the Western Qiang in the early second century CE cost 24 billion cash; in the 130s and 140s CE a further 8 billion was spent over a decade; and in the 160s CE 5.4 billion was budgeted (and 4.4 billion used) for a two-and-a-half year campaign.⁹³ It remains unclear how figures of 1 to 2 billion cash in annual campaign expenditure for major conflicts relate to baseline levels of military spending, but if the latter had routinely greatly exceeded such special commitments it is hard to see why the latter would have seemed noteworthy or onerous.⁹⁴

For the Eastern Han period, at least, the notion of relatively moderate military expenditure is consistent with the fact that the Northern Army, charged with the defense of the capital, Luoyang, is said to have consisted of 3,536 men, a far cry from the 20,000 or so troops and paramilitary units deployed at or near the city of Rome. In the same period, a major military installation north of the Yellow River housed 1,000 troops, and a recent estimate of the strength of a late Western Han garrison at the northern frontier that is well documented thanks to finds of wood strips points to a total of 2,000 troops and a comparable number of support personnel.⁹⁵

While it is true that we lack ratios to extrapolate from such records to overall military manpower, what little evidence we have is not readily compatible, for much of the Han period, with the existence of a standing army that numbered in the hundreds of thousands and even in quiet years absorbed the better part of total state revenue, as it did in the Roman Empire.

Subsidies designed to avert open conflict and exert influence over foreign powers are functionally complementary to military spending and belong in the same overall category of protection costs. This is a rare instance where more information is available from the Chinese side of the comparison. Tributary arrangements were critical in attempts to purchase compliance from peripheral

92. For a recent extreme example, see Chang 2007a: 85–6 (and 178–9), who estimates total annual military spending of at least 29 billion cash based on an army of six hundred thousand to seven hundred thousand with a large share of expensive cavalry. For a list of reported troop strengths under Wudi, many of them seemingly stylized, see 164–73. The impression of extraordinary cost is reinforced by references to multibillion cash outlays to reward troops for individual victories or to induce defection of enemy leaders (Barfield 1989: 56–7). This is an area where source criticism is badly needed.

93. Yü 1967: 61; Peng 1994: 161.

94. It is difficult to know what to make of the list of more than 23 million items of military equipment found among the Yinwan documents and dated to 13 BCE, including over half a million crossbows and over 11 million crossbow bolts (Barbieri-Low 2001: 2), which is too large to be a provincial depository and may refer to the huge arsenal of the capital (cf. Loewe 2004: 77–8, with references to the debate).

95. Bielenstein 1980: 117–8; Chang 2007b: 108–18; cf. also Loewe 2006: 63 for a mere 3,250 troops to man 1,000 kilometers of defense lines.

challengers, especially in the steppe. In the first century CE, some 450 million cash per year was earmarked for subsidies to the Xianbei, Xiongnu, and others. Allowing for comparable allocations to the Wuhuan and Western Qiang, a total of perhaps three-quarters of a billion cash seems possible. We lack comparable cash denominations for tributes during the Western Han period but reports point to similarly large commitments, exemplified by 7 tons of silk floss and 30,000 pieces of silk fabric given to a *shanyu* who visited the imperial court in 1 BCE, on top of regular payments.⁹⁶ It is difficult to relate such figures to regular military spending. Aggregate subsidies in the high nine figures may have been roughly comparable to the annual cost of a standing army of one hundred thousand.

For all we can tell, subsidies played a lesser role throughout Roman history. Although they are reported from the beginning of the imperial monarchy and figures are usually missing, we gain the impression that they were not a particularly heavy burden.⁹⁷ By far the highest recorded amount is a one-time payment of 200 million sesterces to secure peace with the Parthians in 217 CE, at a time when annual military expenditure had swollen to more than a billion. Otherwise, large gifts of 100 or 200 million sesterces are limited to two instances of diplomatic relations with client kingdoms on the eastern frontier. In late antiquity, when the Roman state supposedly relied more frequently on subsidies, reported sums are comparatively modest.⁹⁸

The available evidence suggests that subsidies accounted for a larger share of what we might somewhat anachronistically call “defense spending” in the Han Empire than in the Roman Empire. It is tempting to combine this observation with scenarios of relatively low regular military expenditure in the Han Empire and higher routine commitments to the Roman military, representing two alternative strategies of managing conflict that may have been mediated perhaps not so much by differences in the degree of military dominance in politics as by ecological conditions.⁹⁹ These differences may have persisted for much of the long-run convergence of both systems toward professionalizing military service and its subsequent geographical and social peripherization.¹⁰⁰

4.4. *Overall State Expenditure*

Where did the money go? In the Roman case, a rough breakdown is within reach. In an “average” year of the second century CE, between 600 and 700 million

96. Yü 1967: 61–4 (Eastern Han); Barfield 1989: 64–5 (Western Han).

97. Duncan-Jones 1994: 43–5; cf. Gordon 1949.

98. Dio Cassius 78.27.1 (payment in 217 CE); Suetonius, *Caligula* 16.3, *Nero* 30.2; Dio Cassius 63.6.5 (gifts to client kings). Later payments include 2,100 pounds of gold annually plus 6,000 paid upfront to Attila, equivalent to 8.4 and 24 million sesterces, respectively; and 30,000 *solidi* (or some 2 million sesterces in gold equivalent) paid to the Persians in a treaty in 562 CE.

99. State formation in the Eurasian steppe frequently depended on resource extraction from settled areas: see, e.g., Barfield 1989.

100. Lewis 2000a; Rosenstein 2009.

sesterces went to the military, or 60 to 65 percent of the total; maybe 150 million or more to the inhabitants of the city of Rome, in the form of food, handouts, construction, and entertainment, or 15 percent; between 100 and 150 million to rulers, elites, and administrators via court expenses, salaries, and gifts, or around 15 percent; and probably less than 10 percent to the general provincial population through infrastructure spending and other benefactions. The overwhelming majority of disbursements were concentrated in two geographical areas and on something like 3 percent of the imperial population: the army (and soldiers' families) at the frontiers and the metropolitan population. What matters here are not the actual numbers, which are inevitably tentative, but that no realistic adjustment would allow the (re)allocation of more than a small fraction of state revenue to the tributary subject population.¹⁰¹

Spending on the military provided protection, arguably the main product of any premodern state; much of the remainder was lavished on privileged groups, represented by the ruling class, other imperial retainers, and the metropolitan population. Given the low cost of the expanded administrative apparatus, there is no good reason to assume that this breakdown substantially changed in late antiquity, except that the emergence of multiple capital cities somewhat relaxed geographical constraints on disbursement.¹⁰²

The state expenses of the Han Empire are simply not well enough known to allow similar calculations. However, if state officials received not more than 2 billion out of 10 or 12 billion of total revenue, and if the army did not absorb a much higher amount, a larger share of state income than in the Roman Empire might have been available for local spending even once domain income used to support the capital and savings are taken into account.¹⁰³

In this reconstruction, the Roman Empire would appear as more aristocratically "top-heavy," more detached from local affairs, more heavily militarized, and more engaged in long-distance transfers of resources than the less "top-heavy," more civilianized, less fiscally integrated, and more locally entrenched Han state.

101. Even if we arbitrarily increased provincial spending by several 100 million sesterces it could never account for more than a quarter of the total, and there is no good reason to believe that it was anywhere near that level (see above, §3). In keeping with the estimates developed above, the breakdown in the text is based on low-high estimates of expenditure on the military (600-725 million including handouts), administrative compensation (75-100 million), elite gifts and court expenses (70-100 million), metropolitan construction (20-40 million), the *amona* (50-70 million), games (20-40 million), and provincial construction (80-100 million plus). Katsari 2011: 37-8 is therefore mistaken in suspecting that the military share in state expenditure was lower than usually assumed and that high estimates might merely be a function of its prominence in the Roman sources.

102. Note that the late Roman expansion of the civil service did not curtail militarization: administrative service was a *militia* (Jones 1964: 566).

103. In commentaries to a Tang account of state income and expenditure (Twitchett 1963: 155-6), 40 percent of tax grain went to the capital and 60 percent was spent locally or given to the army. Of textiles, half went to the capital and the other half was used for army, salaries, and local welfare. Of cash, 70 percent was used for provincial salaries and 30 percent for army pay. Alternatively, one-third of cash income and one-seventh of tax grain is said to have been absorbed by the capital. Compared to the Roman Empire, this suggests greater concentration of resources in the capital and less spending on the military.

5. OUTCOMES

The two imperial systems had different backgrounds: while during the phase of expansion beyond Italy, Rome had relied heavily on a two-tier system of conscripting military labor from citizens and externalizing the financial cost of war making by drawing on provincial resources, the Warring States and especially the Qin Dynasty, the basis of the Han system, had attempted intensive mobilization of both military and civilian labor and material resources from the general population.¹⁰⁴ But they began to converge in institutional and organizational terms once they had both achieved imperial unification and security.¹⁰⁵

Both empires made attempts to establish or maintain a broad tax base and lay claim to a wide variety of revenue sources. Yet both were, or became, essentially “low-tax regimes,” benefiting from the lack of peer competitors that could have exerted serious pressure, and eventually unable to adjust once new challenges arose.¹⁰⁶ Even so, a comparative perspective points to differences in the way in which fiscal extraction practices were anchored in society. For the first three centuries of its existence, the Roman monarchy continued republican-era discrimination in favor of the Italian heartland, whereas the Han regime, capitalizing on established modes of surplus mobilization and constrained by less favorable logistics, made greater demands on the core population in the metropolitan regions. More generally, the Roman system maintained greater distance in terms of both extraction and distribution. The state was more detached from revenue collection: taxable assets were normally assessed by local elites and many dues collected by them, in a process that was monitored by an extremely thin governmental superstructure. A large share of state income was captured at choke points along conduits of commercial exchange, targeting above all elite spending, or derived from domains under the state’s direct control. This approach reduced the burden of direct taxation and allowed private rent to flourish at the expense of public tax. Belated attempts in late antiquity to expand the reach of direct taxation appear to have been of limited success and increased friction. Most revenue was spent at great remove from payers, in the capital(s) and in the military frontier zones. Military demands dominated overall expenditure.

104. See Tan forthcoming, on the Roman system, and Lewis forthcoming, on the roots of the Han system.

105. For the overall convergence process, see Scheidel 2009b.

106. For the concept, see the editors’ introduction to Monson and Scheidel forthcoming. The *Hanshu* portrayed the imposition of a land tax of one-fifteenth of yield at the beginning of Han rule as a reduction of the previous Qin rate (Swann 1950: 149–50). Notwithstanding the Han tendency to exaggerate the hardships caused by the Qin, this may well be true (see above, n. 15), and an abatement of earlier war-induced rates is plausible: the Liye tax data from the reign of the First Emperor may allow us to conjecture the existence of a Qin land tax approximating a tithe. Labor service obligations may also have been reduced by the Han (see Deng 1999: 160). Lewis forthcoming considers greater exactions under Wudi as a short-lived analogy to previous Warring States efforts. In Rome, it was not so much regular tax rates that came down but irregular exactions of enormous proportions that ceased with the end of the civil wars (see, e.g., Millar 1984b; Scheidel 2007b). For attempts to improve collection in late antiquity, see the literature above in n. 37.

By contrast, the Han Empire sought to extract revenue more broadly but at the same time transferred it less aggressively. Logistical constraints curtailed discrimination in favor of the center, and poll taxes, which targeted the general population, appear to have been much more widespread than in the Roman Empire. Operating through a formal state bureaucracy, the fiscal apparatus intruded more deeply in local affairs. Whereas in the Roman world, liturgies bridged the gap between local autonomy and central power, the Han state turned locals into government employees. Although we cannot tell for sure, Han military spending may have been less dominant overall, and subsidies played a greater role. For these reasons, as well as logistical constraints, a larger share of revenue might have been spent (or kept) locally.¹⁰⁷ As a corollary, benefits to state agents (as opposed to cooperative but formally autonomous local elites) may have been disbursed more widely than in the much smaller and more steeply hierarchical Roman administrative apparatus.

Moving beyond these basic observations quickly leads us into the realm of conjecture. For example, we might ask whether direct taxation was as crucial to the Han system as is usually surmised,¹⁰⁸ a notion that logically presupposes relatively high rates of taxpayer compliance but may also have depended on the deployment of state officials in revenue collection. If that was indeed the case, and if much of this revenue was spent locally and in the civilian sphere (all of them big “ifs”), we might wonder whether all these features were interconnected. A cross-cultural survey has found broadly based taxation to be positively correlated with bureaucratization and the provision of public goods.¹⁰⁹

This might seem like an unaccountably optimistic vision of the Han state, with its historically limited penetration of local society, presumably endemic corruption, and history of popular unrest. Then again, there is a good reason to embark on this line of inquiry. As I have noted elsewhere, the successful rebuilding of fiscal structures was a vital precondition for imperial unification in the post-Han period, just as the prolonged absence of comparable developments in

107. A note of caution: the Yinwan data point to large cash income, only a small fraction of which could have been spent on local officials, and even suggest the possibility of partial monetization of land tax (see above, n. 64). In the most general terms, this is consistent with the model of “fiscal circulation” proposed for later periods (see Scheidel 2009d: 204 on von Glahn 2004). It also raises the possibility of large-scale cash transfers out of the region, which would not have constituted a heavy logistical burden: 100 million cash would have weighed a little over three tons, or just a few wagonloads worth of metal. (One of the Yinwan documents even explicitly mentions the conveyance of cash to the capital by regional officials: Loewe 2004: 74.) At the same time, long-term nonreciprocal flows of cash would simply have caused price inflation in recipient areas, which means that unless there is evidence of corresponding movement of goods it is hard to see how such practices could have been sustained or profitable unless transfers primarily resulted in centralized hoarding, a distinct possibility (see above, nn. 9 and 35, on state savings) that would be consistent with a more primitive fiscal system. Two possible scenarios, one in which the center supplied cash that circulated mostly regionally, and one in which cash moved back and forth between center and peripheries in a cycle of minting, hoarding, and targeted disbursement, are largely identical in terms of ultimate outcomes, yet quite different from a “tax-and-trade” circulation model (see De Ligt 2003).

108. Lewis forthcoming regards land taxes and labor services as the backbone of the Han fiscal system and notes that tolls on commercial and urban activity were of lesser importance than in later periods.

109. See Blanton and Fargher 2008: 251–3.

post-Roman Europe coincided with diminished state power and political fragmentation. More remarkably, Han-style fiscal institutions appear to have survived even in periods of severe dislocation throughout the extended Period of Disunion up the sixth century CE.¹¹⁰

This is where a comparative perspective on taxing and spending might be of help in addressing a much bigger historical question. By funneling resources toward high-level agents, a privileged capital city, and a military that were all far removed from local society, the Roman state weakened the nexus between taxation and spending. Local spending was sustained in the first instance by local taxation and largesse.¹¹¹ Imperial investment was limited and, more importantly, ambiguous even when it occurred. In a world of liturgical obligations, road construction was a decidedly mixed blessing, and even more popular infrastructure investments would have been mediated by the intervention of local elites, thereby separating donor from recipient. In the Han system, which could not yet rely on the great canals of later dynasties, geography impeded massive transfer of staples,¹¹² senior officials were paid less, the military was less lavishly endowed and at least in times of stability more constrained by civilian leadership, and local affairs above the village level were dealt with by formal state agents rather than self-governing urban elites.

This superficially paradoxical combination of greater cellularity and deeper state penetration may have strengthened the institution of the state at the local level. In the long term it may ultimately have been conducive to the creation of more lasting ties between state and (local elite) society. If true, this process, and its fiscal dimension, may be worthy of consideration as a further addition to the growing number of factors that are being marshaled to explain the permanent dissolution of the Roman Empire and the comparatively greater resilience or perhaps rather regenerative capacity of early Chinese state institutions.¹¹³

110. Scheidel 2011a.

111. Schwarz 2001 and Zuiderhoek 2009 both emphasize the importance of municipal income relative to private benefactions ("euergetism"). For municipal finances, see Burton 2004.

112. A "tax-and-trade" system akin to that of the Roman Empire arose only later: see n. 107.

113. Scheidel in progress b.

Urban Systems in the Han and Roman Empires

State Power and Social Control

Carlos F. Noreña

THE ancient Han and Roman Empires both stand out among premodern states for their geographical extent and chronological duration. Other premodern empires, though shorter-lived, laid claim to larger territories, such as the Achaemenid Empire or the Abbasid Caliphate, while a handful of smaller imperial systems in early South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Central America appear to have held sway for longer periods. With respect to both size and longevity, however, the Han and Roman Empires were unparalleled. In order to understand these spectacular projections of state power across space and over time, it is necessary to understand how these two imperial states managed to control the various resources, both material and human, that sustained their respective state apparatus. One way into this complex question is to consider the functions of cities in the two empires. For in both the Han and Roman Empires, as in all complex, agrarian societies, cities were the critical points of concentration in a wider landscape—or, perhaps better, the critical nodes in a more extensive network—in which material and human resources could be organized, regulated, and controlled most effectively. By examining the changing dynamics of urban systems in the two empires, then, we can begin to assess the extent to which cities were the products of Han and Roman state power, respectively, and whether or not they served as effective instruments of social control in these two far-flung imperial states. That is the aim of this chapter.

It must be acknowledged that a systematic and comprehensive comparison of the urban systems of the Han and Roman Empires is not possible. In the first place, we lack the demographic data necessary to measure rates of urbanization with any precision, and the material record from urban contexts is insufficient for documenting, in detail, the intensity with which individual cities interacted with one another as parts of larger urban networks.¹ These problems are particularly acute for the study of early China. Equally problematic is the substantial

1. For a lucid treatment of the challenges in the historical study of urbanization, see de Vries 1990.

imbalance in the modern scholarship on cities, urbanism, and urbanization in the two empires. Mediterranean archaeology has matured into an autonomous discipline, mostly independent of the scholarly agenda set by researchers working primarily from literary sources, and is now beginning to generate the sorts of studies that enable synthetic analysis of long-term settlement patterns across the Roman Empire.² The archaeology of early China, by contrast, remains tethered to the written evidence, and continues to focus on the monumental and artifactual record of the larger sites. There are promising signs of change, but still very little in the way of system-level analyses of urbanization as a multivariate process.³ But these gaps in the demographic and material evidence and the disparate research agendas of scholars working on urbanism in ancient China and the ancient Mediterranean, respectively, do not rule out all comparative analysis of the relationship between urbanism and state power in the Han and Roman Empires. For as I hope to show in this chapter, it is possible to identify some broad patterns and key features of this relationship that shed important light on the nature, extent, and depth of social control within these two imperial systems.

We may define urbanization, following Tisdale, as a process of population concentration that proceeds either through the multiplication of individual points of concentration or by an increase in the size of individual points of concentration (or both).⁴ In the premodern world, these “points of concentration,” which we may call “cities,” were characterized above all by an economy that was structurally distinct from that of the countryside. In particular, they were places populated mainly by the consumers of an agricultural surplus, typified by a relatively complex division of labor (including secondary and tertiary production), and shaped by the resulting economic and social stratification. These were the essential characteristics that distinguished cities from other settlements and from the countryside.⁵ In practice, of course, premodern cities were also differentiated from the countryside because of the concentration there of political institutions, administrative functions, and sociocultural services and attractions. These concentrations resulted largely from the clustering in cities of landowning aristocrats, which not only facilitated the collective decision-making capability of these elites but also attracted artisans, merchants, and others who sought to capitalize on their wealth and spending power. As a result of the clustering of

2. For a basic orientation into Mediterranean archaeology, see Alcock and Osborne 2012; for the most recent overviews of urbanization and settlement in the Roman Empire, see Bowman and Wilson 2011; Noreña in progress b.

3. Li 2008 provides a brief overview of recent research on urbanism in Chinese history, highlighting the continuing emphasis on traditional questions (1–4), but also noting the emergence of new techniques and approaches, such as GIS and “trend analysis” in the study of regional variation in urban activity (16); for an outsider’s perspective on the archaeology of early China, see discussion in Snodgrass 2010 (“still in a phase of youthful vigour,” 247).

4. Tisdale 1942: 311. For the demographic basis of premodern urbanization, see also Scheidel 2007a: 74–85, esp. 81 for the crucial variables that determine relative levels of urbanization.

5. This does not mean, of course, that cities were devoid of agricultural producers, or that the countryside was devoid of secondary production (see, briefly, Bairoch 1989: 263–6); but the structural division between the two spheres is beyond question.

aristocrats in them, that is, premodern cities were not only demographic points of concentration—the primary variable that distinguished them from the countryside—but also political-administrative centers, commercial centers, and cultural centers. The concentration of aristocrats in cities is also particularly relevant to the issues of state power and social control, especially in the case of premodern empires, since these local elites usually served as the critical links between the central state and local communities. For the purposes of this chapter, then, what “urbanization” ultimately measures is the changing spatial distribution of these demographic, economic, political-administrative, and cultural points of concentration, and the interrelated set of processes and activities characteristic of them, especially those in which social power was constituted.⁶

The main argument of this chapter is that state power was significant in structuring urbanization (as defined here) in both the Han and Roman Empires, but that the actual operation of state power was rather different in the two cases, with important implications for the relative capacities for social control possessed by the two states. In the case of the Han Empire, as I will argue, state power was mostly direct and interventionist in its impact on urbanization; in the Roman Empire, by contrast, it was mostly indirect, but still very intrusive.⁷ Of course this distinction between direct and interventionist state power, on the one hand, and indirect and intrusive state power, on the other, is very schematic, and naturally cannot account for every last facet of the relationship between urbanism and state power in the two empires. This schematism is justifiable in the sort of macroscopic comparative analysis undertaken here, however, since my focus is necessarily trained on the “big picture,” and not on the myriad incidental details and minor exceptions from each case.

In order to assess the effects of state power on urbanization in the two empires, we must first consider two important variables. The first is geography. In preindustrial economies, levels of urbanization were always restricted by limited agricultural surpluses, which could only reach urban consumers by means of a communications infrastructure that was itself constrained by transport costs, especially the much higher costs of long-distance overland transport. So the sizes and locations of cities in the Han and Roman Empires were both partly determined by the configuration of the wider landscapes in which these cities were situated. The second important variable to bear in mind is the level and extent of urbanization prior to the consolidation of power by the Han and Roman states. For both empires established their rule over territories that already had well-established patterns of urban and rural settlement. These preexisting settlement

6. This broadly functional understanding of “the city” in the premodern world draws in particular on Wickham 2005: 591–6, and on Horden and Purcell 2000: 89–122, who stress that cities are always the products of deeper, mainly ecological processes; cf. Abrams 1978 for helpful discussion of towns not as independent variables, but as key sites within “larger systems,” whether seen in political, social, or economic (and, I would add, cultural) terms.

7. The formulation here is inspired by Alcock 1993: 129–71.

patterns must be taken into account if we are to identify the specific changes that came about as the result of Han and Roman state power. Let us briefly consider each variable in turn.

First, geography. The world of early imperial China—roughly the eastern half of modern China south of Inner Mongolia and Manchuria—evolved within the macroregions defined by two large drainage basins, “natural vessels for territorially based socioeconomic systems.” The first, to the north, was cut by the Yellow River and its tributaries, and was composed of loess highlands in the west and southwest, low mountains and rolling hills in the northwest, and a giant alluvial floodplain in the east. The loess soils of the highlands and the sedimentary soils of the floodplain were both very fertile, but the latter required an elaborate irrigation system to offset the effects of low rainfall and a reduced river flow during the growing season (late spring and early summer). The second drainage basin, to the south, was formed by the Yangtze River and its major tributaries. Surrounded by high mountain chains and rugged hills, this region was considerably hotter and wetter than its neighbor to the north, and its agricultural productivity marginal at best. Because of its superior soils, milder climate, and greater ease of communications, the Yellow River valley was much better suited to supporting a large, settled population. It formed the central core of the Han Empire, reflected both in the spatial distribution of kingdom and commandery capitals throughout the empire, with a clear concentration in the North China Plain, and especially in the higher population densities of this area, as recorded in the *Hanshu* census figures of 2 CE (fig. 1).⁸

Growing outward from its original core on the Italian peninsula, the Roman Empire came to be centered on the Mediterranean Sea, from which it spread deep into the continental hinterlands around the sea’s perimeter. It used to be conventional to categorize the entire core region as having a “Mediterranean” climate, but recent work has underlined the striking diversity of the empire’s numerous microregions, which comprised a very wide range of landscapes, ecologies, and agricultural regimes. In the most general terms, the geography of the Mediterranean world was characterized by a sea that facilitated both short- and long-distance communications (except in the winter months), and a continental periphery that was not only densely fragmented but also often screened from the sea by high coastal chains that restricted access to the interior. Because this was a world of relatively low agricultural surpluses and unpredictable fluctuations in rainfall and temperature, the forging of multiple links between microregions was

8. For the relationship over the long term between cities and regions in China, see Skinner 1977, esp. 9–30, 211–18, 275–99 (quoted, 11); on regionalism in early China, see Lewis 2006: 189–244 and 2007: 5–29. On kingdoms and commanderies, see Bielenstein 1980: 90–9; Loewe 2006: 37–55. On *Hanshu* figures and population density, see Bielenstein 1947. It should be noted that there was significant population movement, over the long term, from north to south (see Skinner 1977: 9–11, with table 1.1), but for most of the Han period, the south remained a peripheral zone; see Erickson, Song-mi, and Nylan 2010: 152–65.

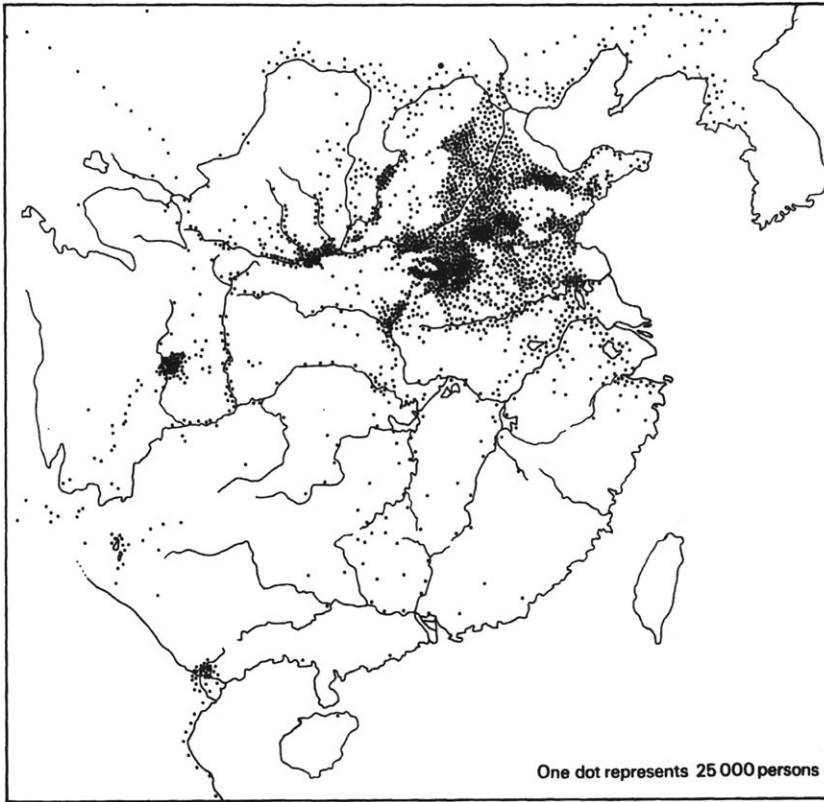


FIGURE 1. *Settlement Distribution in the Han Empire in the Early First Century CE.*

the best strategy to minimize endemic environmental risk. Connectivity, in brief, was critical.⁹ As a result of this basic imperative, the spatial distribution of cities in the Roman Empire was quite uneven, with much higher concentrations of urban settlement on or near the Mediterranean coast and in proximity to navigable rivers (fig. 2).¹⁰

In both the Han and Roman Empires, then, geography played a crucial role in determining the spread of cities. Agricultural productivity and the efficiency of natural communications were the two key criteria that governed the potential for urban density. In this respect, the Yellow River drainage basin and the perimeter

9. The study of Mediterranean ecology and connectivity in the premodern period was placed on a new footing by Horden and Purcell 2000. For the functional “shape” of the Roman world, incorporating geography, travel times, and seasonal data, see now the Stanford ORBIS project: <http://orbis.stanford.edu>.

10. Figure 2 represents a preliminary map from a research project on the urbanization of the Roman world (Noreña in progress a). It is based on data collected from the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Princeton, 2000), and includes all sites from the “Roman” period (ca. 30 BCE–300 CE) that were larger than the smallest settlements included in the *Barrington Atlas* (i.e., the top four sizes in the five-size typology employed in the atlas, as explained on xxv).

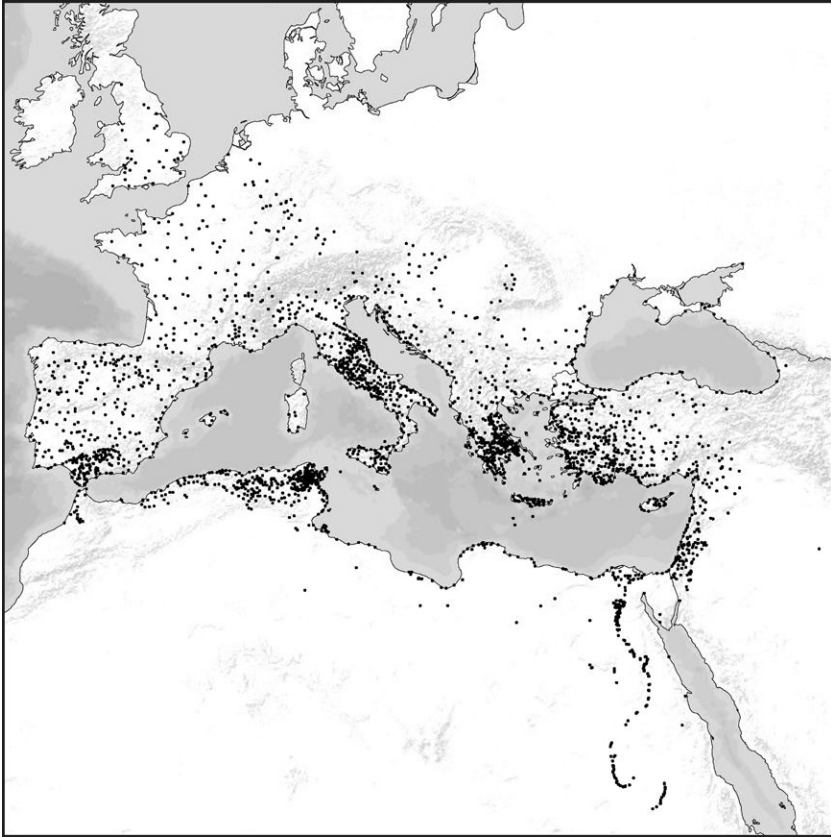


FIGURE 2. *Urban Sites in the Roman Empire in the Mid-Second Century CE.*

of the Mediterranean Sea may be seen as structurally analogous. Both macroregions, each broadly oriented along an east-west axis, served as the geographical cores of wider imperial systems, and both, not incidentally, were marked by higher concentrations of cities than their respective peripheries.¹¹ These were the geographical parameters within which urbanism developed in the two empires.

Preexisting settlement patterns in the areas that came to be controlled by the two empires were also analogous, at least in large-scale spatial terms. Permanent, walled settlements in the North China Plain can be traced back to the second millennium BCE.¹² For the itinerant kings of the Shang Dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE),

11. See Lewis 2007: 7 for the predominance of east-west lines of communication in early imperial China. The Mediterranean also lies along an extended east-west axis, and much of its history in the premodern period reflects an underlying “divide” between East and West (see, briefly, Horden and Purcell 2000: 18–22; cf. Bowersock 2005), but the sea itself facilitated multidirectional communications in a way that was not true of the river basins of the Chinese heartland.

12. The earliest, nonwalled settlements can be dated to the Neolithic period (ca. 5000 BCE), but these sites do not really count as “urban,” according to the criteria listed above; see discussion in Steinhardt 1990: 36–42.

these settlements served as strategic hubs, and in this respect can be seen as forming the “backbone” of the Shang state. These settlements seem to have functioned in this way under the Western Zhou rulers (ca. 1045–771 BCE) as well.¹³ It was really during the Spring and Autumn period (770–481 BCE), though, following the collapse of centralized, monarchic political authority in the eighth century BCE, that largely autonomous (but often federated) city-states first arose, and that a mature and stable urban network in the North China Plain first came into being. It has been estimated that the larger cities during this period, which numbered around two hundred, had populations in the tens of thousands, and perhaps averaged something on the order of eight to nine square kilometers in size.¹⁴ By comparison with their predecessors, these cities had more developed infrastructural capacities, especially in terms of drainage systems; were more articulated spatially, with burials, for example, confined to the cities’ extramural territories; and had more differentiated urban economies, characterized by increased handicraft specialization.¹⁵ The average distance between these larger urban agglomerations was around ninety to one hundred kilometers.¹⁶ They clearly sat at the top of regional settlement hierarchies, but the number, spread, and intensity of interaction between these secondary centers are unknown. Outside of the North China Plain, the only other heavily urbanized region was the Chengdu Plain in the upper Yangtze river valley. Here, too, a mature urban system emerged during the Spring and Autumn period, with several large cities, such as Chengdu, Guangdu, and Xindu, serving as the cores of more extensive urban networks.¹⁷ Other regions that came to be controlled by the Han state, by contrast, were much less urbanized, especially throughout the mountainous and less hospitable regions of the middle and lower Yangtze River drainage basin. In the geographical spread of cities and urban networks, then, the territory that came to be ruled by the Han (and their Qin predecessors) was marked by a dramatic imbalance between a heavily urbanized north, especially in the North China Plain, and a much less urbanized south (with the exception of the Chengdu Plain).¹⁸

Mediterranean urbanization prior to the Roman conquest was also unbalanced geographically, with many more cities in the eastern half of the Mediterranean world than in the western half. This imbalance stems from the long urban

13. For the function of urban centers in the Shang period, see Keightley 1983; cf. Lewis 2000b: 359–62.

14. Figures in the text are from Steinhardt 1990: 43–50; but see also Chen 1994, based on six case studies of Spring and Autumn cities, suggesting an average size of sixteen square kilometers for the larger cities. In general on the world of the Spring and Autumn city-states, see Lewis 2000b.

15. For these changes, see Chen 1994: 735–40, with table 6 (evidence for handicrafts).

16. Lewis 2000b: 363, citing the calculations of Miyazaki Ichisada.

17. Duan 1999 emphasizes the rapid growth of the urban system in this region during the Spring and Autumn period, and argues that urbanization in this region, unlike in the Yellow River valley, was driven by economic (and not political) considerations.

18. For a recent overview of the archaeology of the nonurbanized peripheries of the North China Plain, see Erickson, Song-mi, and Nylan 2010.

tradition in the East, which began and developed with the rise and growth of centralized states in the Near East and Egypt (beginning in the third millennium BCE); progressed with the rise of the *polis* in the central and southern Greek peninsula (beginning in the eighth century BCE); spread throughout the central and eastern Mediterranean with Greek colonization in the Black Sea, southern Italy, Sicily, and parts of North Africa (ca. 800–600 BCE); and was further reinforced by the foundation of new cities and the urban-based administrations of the Hellenistic kingdoms (ca. 300–30 BCE).¹⁹ The larger cities in this world system had populations in the tens of thousands—the largest, such as Antioch and Alexandria, perhaps reaching into the low hundreds of thousands—and all served the multiple functions, economic, politicoadministrative, and cultural, normally associated with higher-order centers. By the time of Roman imperial expansion into the eastern Mediterranean in the second century BCE, in brief, this macroregion was already highly urbanized. The western Mediterranean and continental Europe, by contrast, could be seen as a tribal periphery of this urbanized and politically centralized world. In these areas, social and political institutions were quite rudimentary, and urbanism had not taken hold outside of a few isolated pockets, usually on or near the Mediterranean coast.²⁰ Empirical data for urbanization in the ancient Mediterranean illustrates this geographical imbalance. In the early third century BCE, just prior to Rome's creation of an overseas empire, there were something on the order of thirteen hundred cities in the territories that came to be incorporated into the Roman state, of which roughly 90 percent were located in Italy, Sicily, Numidia, and the eastern half of the Mediterranean basin.²¹ As in the case of the Han Empire, so too in that of Rome, the territory that came to be conquered and annexed by the central state was characterized by a fundamental division between a heavily urbanized zone (in this case the central and eastern thirds of what became the Roman Empire) and an adjacent zone almost wholly devoid of cities and urban networks (the western third).

These, then, were the main geographical parameters and historical contexts within which urban systems developed in the Han and Roman Empires, and they must be kept in mind in attempting to identify the impact of state power in shaping urbanization in each of the two imperial states. In order to sustain my argument that state power tended to operate differently in the two empires—direct and interventionist in the case of Han, indirect (but intrusive) in the case of

19. For the rise of cities and urbanization in Mesopotamia in the third millennium BCE, see, e.g., Kuhrt 1997, vol. 1, part 1; van de Mieroop 2007: part 1. Hansen and Nielsen 2004 provide an inventory of Greek cities in the archaic and classical periods (ca. 800–300 BCE). Jones 1940 remains the best single-volume survey of Greek cities during the Hellenistic period; for a more recent overview, see also Billows 2003.

20. Dietler 2007 offers a useful overview of the pre-Roman, late Iron Age West.

21. Figures from Noreña in progress a. The database includes 1,270 sites attested in ca. 300 BCE. Note that this number includes “size four” cities (see above, n. 10), so should be seen as a “high” count; the “low” count, which would only include cities in the top three ranks, comes to 562 sites. The pronounced geographical imbalance between East and West, the main point I want to stress here, is the same on either count.

Rome—I will explore three topics: capital cities, what I will call “artificial” cities, and urban-based administration. This will then set the stage for a broader discussion of the “place” of elites in cities, and the spatial distribution of social power more generally, which should provide some insight into the problem of social control in the two empires. It goes without saying that all of these topics are vast, and that it is far beyond the scope of this chapter to examine any of them in detail. What follows, then, is just a sketch, designed to illustrate, rather than formally prove, my thesis.

1. CAPITAL CITIES

The capital cities of premodern empires were, above all, centers of power. They were usually primate cities, often dwarfing even the next largest cities in the urban networks in which they were situated. It was in capital cities that political institutions and decision-making authority were most concentrated. As a result, capital cities tended to control the material resources of the territories under their rule. The centrality of capital cities was also symbolic, as monuments, public space, and public rituals usually differentiated the capital city from all others, making it a place of wonder. And this, too, helped to define the capital city’s place at the center, and top, of a wider imperial system. So in several respects, capital cities are relevant to the issues of state power, urbanization, and social control.

Chang’an, the capital city of the Western Han Empire, was more or less built from scratch under the first Han emperor, Gaozu (r. 206–195 BCE). Founded on the site of an earlier Qin palace, near a strategic location on the Wei River, the city grew rapidly into a giant urban agglomeration and spectacular expression of Han state power and monarchic authority (fig. 3). The urban space of Chang’an was dominated by five royal palaces, built under successive Han emperors, which together occupied roughly two-thirds of the area within the city walls. These palaces were multipurpose structures, serving not only as ritual and administrative complexes but also as towering and intimidating expressions of the power and prestige of the ruling dynasty.²² Equally impressive were the city’s exterior walls, constructed during the reign of Gaozu’s successor, the emperor Hui (r. 194–187 BCE), standing 12 meters high, measuring 25,700 meters in perimeter, and enclosing an area of roughly 36 square kilometers, and the elaborate sequence of interior walls, which emphatically partitioned space within the city.²³ Other markers of imperial authority in the city included the Armory, a massive structure (ca. 250,000 square meters) which contained a huge stockpile

22. See discussion in Steinhardt 1990: 55–7, 63–5, and 67–8; Wu 1995: 150–6; Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens 2010: 174–5. In general on the expression of monarchic ideology in early imperial cities, with emphasis on verticality and invisibility, see Lewis 2006: 150–69.

23. On exterior walls, see Hotaling 1978. For the interior walls, see briefly Brennan and Hsing 2010: 204; in general on the partitioning of urban space in early Chinese cities, see Yinong 2000: 74–7 and 239.

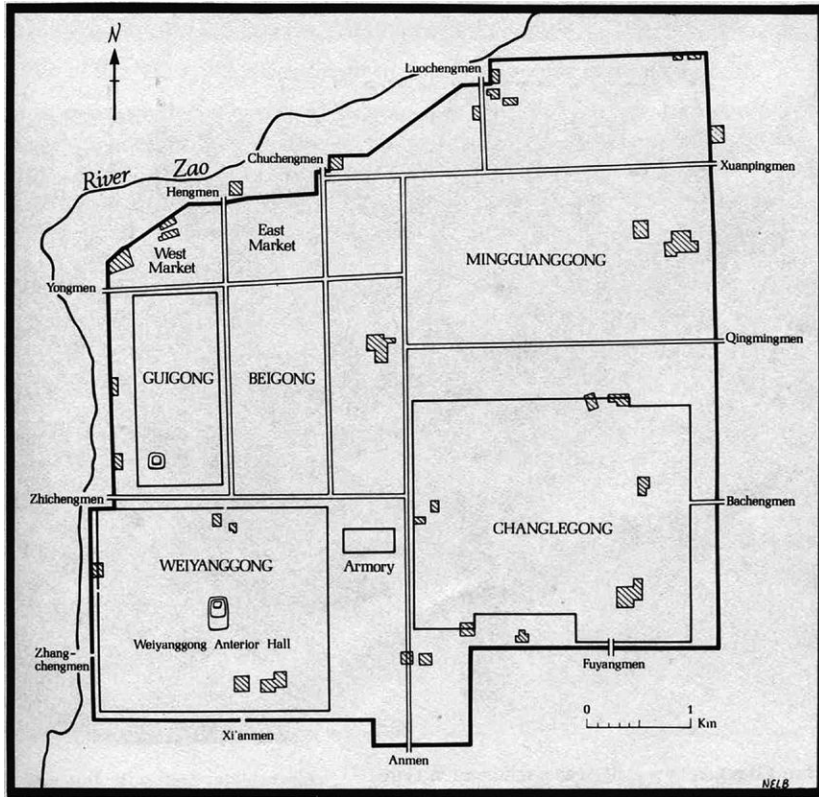


FIGURE 3. *Plan of Chang'an in the Early First Century CE.*

of the regime's weapons and armor, and the numerous gate towers located throughout the city, especially at the monumental city gates and inside the two central markets, which conveyed an unmistakable message of imperial omnipresence and official surveillance.²⁴ As a "palace" city, Chang'an was certainly a potent symbol of the Han Dynasty. But these palaces also housed a number of imperial archives, making the city a key administrative center, and a new imperial library, making it a locus for the organization of knowledge; it was also a site where broader cultural and intellectual trends, such as classicism (sometimes labeled "Confucianism"), originated or gained momentum.²⁵ In addition, it became a major urban agglomeration, with a population perhaps on the order of four hundred thousand, and a magnet for the ambitious elites of other areas.²⁶ It also spurred the development of an entirely new urban network, formed by the

24. On the Armory, see Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2010: 175. On gate towers in early Chinese cities, see Lewis 2007: 77–9.

25. For these aspects of Chang'an, see the editors' introduction to Nylan and Vankeerberghen forthcoming.

26. The population is calculated from the census data of 2 CE; see Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2010: 177.

tomb towns that grew up in the city's outskirts (see below, section 2). In demographic, political, and cultural terms, then, the city of Chang'an was clearly a key point of concentration, the critical node in the overall urban system of the Han Empire. It was also, both in its origins and in its subsequent development, a direct product of Han state power.

It took hundreds of years before the city of Rome reached the size of Chang'an, or occupied a position of comparable influence and power. Embedded within a cluster of other city-states in central Italy, but benefiting from its relatively large size, Rome had assumed a dominant position over the other cities of Latium by the end of the fifth century BCE, and by the middle of the third century BCE had become the sole hegemonic power in the Italian peninsula.²⁷ It was not until the second century BCE, however, that the city of Rome grew into a true megalopolis, mainly as the result of rural immigration from within Italy. This large-scale population shift was itself triggered by fundamental changes in landholding patterns throughout the Italian peninsula, brought about by the massive influx of wealth and slave labor that came with the Roman state's rapid expansion into the Mediterranean basin.²⁸ The population of the city continued to grow over the course of the last two centuries BCE, eventually reaching (and perhaps surpassing) the plateau of 1 million inhabitants, and because of its size and political influence, it shaped the dynamics of urban networks throughout the peninsula, and dictated the flow of material and human resources within it.²⁹ And yet, because the Roman state still operated under a republican system of government, in which decision making was spread out across multiple institutions, and political power divided between a group of fiercely competitive aristocratic families, there was little in the way of consistent, centralized, long-term planning in the city itself, with the result that Rome's cityscape was somewhat erratic and symbolically fragmented, hardly emblematic of its status as an imperial capital.³⁰ The situation in the monumental city center began to change under the influence of the "warlords" of the late Republic, especially Sulla and Caesar in the first century BCE, as the Forum area and Capitoline Hill began to reflect Rome's imperial power. But it was really with the advent of monarchy under Augustus, and the effective monopolization of decision-making authority under the new regime, that the city

27. Rome's conquest of Italy can be attributed to its huge manpower advantage over its competitors, the product of an effective system of treaty obligations imposed on defeated communities; see Eich and Eich 2005 for a cogent analysis of republican imperialism as a type of state formation; and see further discussion below. The population of the city at the end of the third century BCE has been estimated at two hundred thousand (Morley 1996: 39, with references to earlier literature).

28. The causation, chronology, and impact of these interrelated developments continue to be the subject of intense debates (to which the formulation in the text above, which derives mainly from Hopkins 1978: 1–98, can hardly do justice). For a recent discussion, with ample references, see Rosenstein 2008.

29. On population, see Lo Cascio 2000. For the effects of the city of Rome on Italian urbanization and economic organization, see Morley 1996 and 2001; Patterson 2006. For the demographic background, see Scheidel 2008b.

30. A convenient overview of Rome's republican topography is in Dyson 2010: 17–116; for the relationship between competitive politics and a fractured urban cityscape, see also Favro 1996: 24–78.

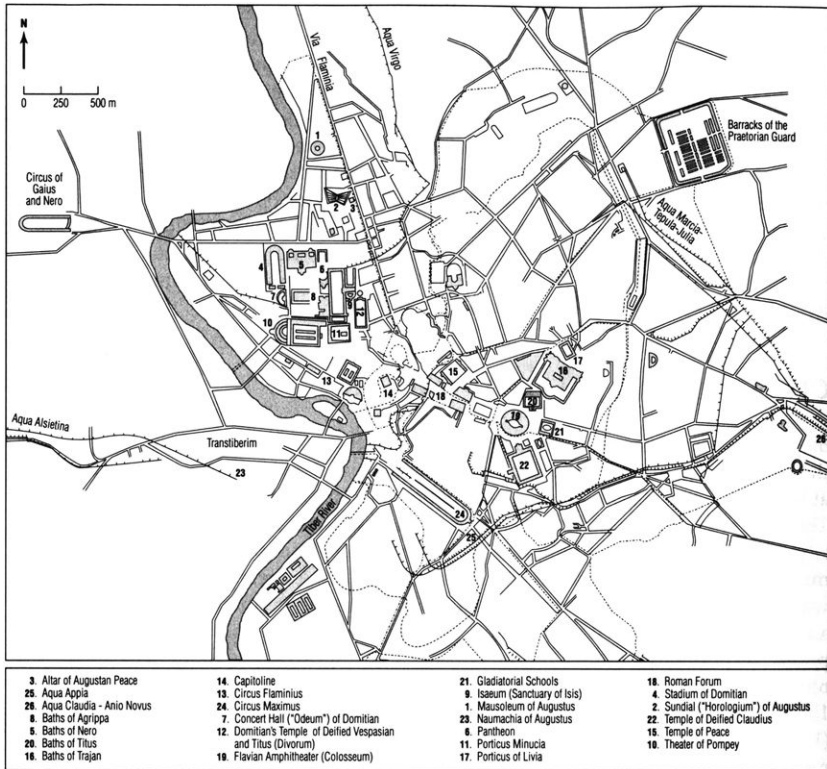


FIGURE 4. *Plan of Rome in the Early Second Century CE.*

was transformed, especially in its internal administration and in its urban fabric, which increasingly reflected the power and dominance of Augustus and his successors (fig. 4).³¹ From that point forward it was very much an imperial capital, as a political and administrative center; as the main hub in the Mediterranean-wide networks of objects, ideas, and people; and as a monumental expression of Rome's dominance over a far-flung empire. In these respects, it was both a product and an instrument of Roman state power.

With very large populations and significant control over supraregional resource flows, and as centers of key decision-making institutions, aggrandized by a series of imposing public monuments, both Chang'an and Rome were appropriate capital cities of their respective empires. They were also effective vehicles for the maintenance of state power, both politically and ideologically. As products of state power, however, they developed in very different ways. Whereas Chang'an was self-consciously and deliberately created by the emperor Gaozu to be a new

31. For the transformation of Rome under Augustus, see Favro 1996; cf. Dyson 2010: 117–91. For the impact of monarchy on the city more generally, see Ewald and Noreña 2010.

imperial capital, and was therefore a direct product of state power, the city of Rome, under the Republic, only gradually developed into a large and influential city as the result of Rome's Italian and overseas conquests, and should be seen, as a result, as an indirect product of state power. Both Chang'an and Rome—like all capital cities—depended on particular configurations of political authority and military power, that is, but only in the case of the former was that authority and power translated into the making of a capital city in a “top-down” manner. Under the imperial monarchy, the city of Rome came to function in a manner that was very similar to Chang'an, and was increasingly, like the Han capital, a product of direct state power.³² So it is important to be sensitive to changes over time in the position of the two cities within their respective political landscapes. At least in their origins and early histories, though, Chang'an and Rome developed along rather different trajectories, and thus demonstrate the different short- and long-term effects of state power in the formation of capital cities.

2. “ARTIFICIAL” CITIES

All cities in preindustrial economies are in one sense artificial, in that they depend on a set of political institutions, coercive instruments, and legitimizing mechanisms that together enable a group of nonprimary producers to live off the surplus produced by peasant farmers. Nevertheless, we can still make a useful distinction between urbanization as a deep and embedded process and the formation of those urban agglomerations that only come about through the rational-purposive actions of the central state. Good examples of such cities, which we may call “artificial,” to distinguish them from those cities that develop more organically, can be found in both the Han and Roman Empires, but they arose, as we will see, through quite different modalities of state power.

The clearest examples of artificial cities in the Han Empire were the so-called tomb towns that appeared in the outskirts of Chang'an. These towns grew up in the immediate vicinities of the royal tombs of Han emperors, which were buried underneath massive artificial mountains erected to the north of the capital city, on a ridge along the north side of the Zheng Guo canal (north of the Wei River), and to the east, along the Chan River.³³ Thirteen such funerary mounds were constructed under the Western Han state, from that of the emperor Gao (r. 202–195 BCE) at Changling to that of the emperor Ping (1 BCE–6 CE) at Kangling (fig. 5). Designed to provide an elaborate ritual space for deceased emperors and their families, these monumental tomb complexes required regular maintenance and a steady income, which in turn required designated territories and a sufficient

32. This is a central argument of Noreña forthcoming. For the more conventional view that Chang'an and Rome were fundamentally different, especially in their respective cityscapes, see Brennan and Hsing: 2010; cf. Lewis's chapter in this volume, chapter 7.

33. On the imperial tombs, see most recently Loewe 2010a.

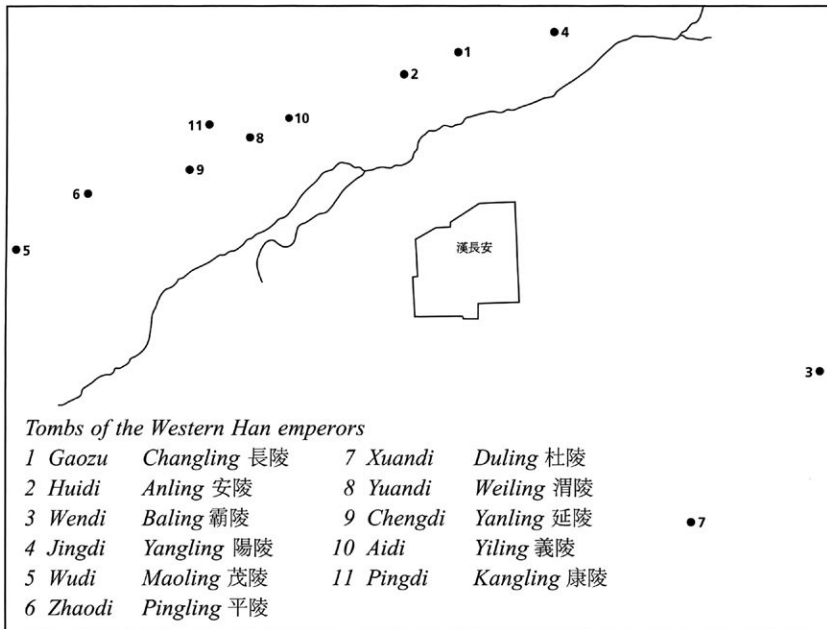


FIGURE 5. Tomb Towns on the Outskirts of Chang'an, Early First Century CE.

number of permanent inhabitants to sustain them. In order to secure the necessary populations, a number of Han emperors, on at least seven occasions, forcibly removed peoples from elsewhere in the empire, often including leading families from provincial areas, and resettled them in these new towns adjacent to the capital.³⁴ And the numbers were impressive. According to one estimate, these towns reached populations of over three hundred thousand, and some of them might have been larger than the city of Chang'an within the walls.³⁵ In terms of size, then, these tomb towns were major settlements, and we may assume that they fulfilled a number of higher-order urban functions. These new cities were also self-consciously manufactured by the central state. If a line of royal tombs had not been set up along the Zheng Guo Canal, and had provincial populations not been forcibly resettled in their immediate vicinities, there is no reason to believe that this string of very large cities would have developed in this particular place. These tomb towns, then, represent an unambiguous case of a type of urbanization driven by the direct and interventionist application of state power.

34. Loewe 1986a: 209–10; Lewis 2007: 22–3 and 95–6. The logic of such population transfers is articulated by a court official who attempts to convince the emperor Chengdi (r. 33–7 BCE) that another such transfer should be effected: "For more than thirty years nobody in the empire has moved to live in towns associated with imperial tombs. There is an increasing mass of wealthy people east of the passes, most of whom have fixed their claim to the best fields and are causing the poor to serve them. They ought to be moved to the new tomb, in order to strengthen the imperial capital and weaken the regional nobility" (*Hanshu* 30, quoted in Lewis 2007: 23).

35. Lewis 2007: 95, referring to census data from 2 CE (see above, n. 26).

In the Roman Empire, the civilian settlements (*vici* and *canabae*) that developed in the Danubian frontier zone could also be seen as “artificial” cities. This zone had very little contact with the world of the Mediterranean, and no real tradition of urbanization, prior to the Roman conquest under the emperor Augustus at the turn of the first millennium. And yet by the end of the second century CE, this frontier area was studded with an interlocking series of urban agglomerations.³⁶ The evolution of this particular urban system is easy to trace. Over the course of the first century CE, following the Augustan conquest, a cordon of military bases was set up along the Danube River, comprising both massive legionary bases and smaller auxiliary forts. In addition, several veteran colonies were founded between the Balkans and the Danube. At the beginning of the second century, under the emperor Trajan, the Dacian Kingdom north of the Danube was conquered and annexed, while a more extensive road system and increased colonial settlement in the lower Danube region facilitated the development of a mature, regional urban network. By the middle of the second century, in fact, scores of civilian settlements had grown up in the immediate vicinity of the military installations along the Danube and in Dacia, many of which were converted by the emperor Hadrian into formal Roman municipalities.³⁷ Lacking some of the defining characteristics of classical Mediterranean cities, especially in terms of monumental architecture, these civilian settlements in the Danube frontier zone used to be ignored by historians of Roman urbanization, but it is now widely recognized that these sites sat atop regional settlement hierarchies, and many provided the sorts of services associated with higher-order centers. On any functional definition, that is, they qualify as “cities.” And they were all the products of Roman state power. These settlements had not arisen, however, because the central state had implemented a policy of urbanization in this area, but rather because previously dispersed local populations were attracted to these sites by the prospect of profiting from the presence there of Roman soldiers, stationed along the frontiers for strategic reasons and flush with the money paid to them by the central state.³⁸ So the role of state power in generating this particular urban system is clear, but its impact on this regional settlement pattern was indirect, a consequence—surely unintentional—of its military strategy and fiscal apparatus.

Both in the case of the tomb towns around Chang'an and in the case of the civilian settlements adjacent to military installations along the Danube frontier

36. Some recent studies of different aspects of urbanization in the Danubian region are Oltean 2007 (Dacia); Haynes 2011 (Thrace); Mladenovic 2012 (Moesia Superior). For the archaeology of this macroregion, currently being transformed by aerial photography, see also Wilkes 2005.

37. For general discussions of *vici* and *canabae*, see Poulter 1987; Hanel 2007.

38. Kemmers 2006: 189–244 gives a detailed account of military expenditure and the logistics of making cash payments to soldiers. For military spending in the context of the Roman state's overall expenditure, see Scheidel, chapter 5 in this volume, estimating that such spending amounted to well over one half of all state expenditure (60–65 percent).

zone, then, a cluster of “artificial” cities had arisen in a particular area, at a particular time, as the result of central state power. The key difference, of course, is that the tomb towns were aggressively manufactured by the coercive application of state power, while the *vici* and *canabae* were formed by the voluntary relocation of previously dispersed regional populations—but only, it is worth repeating, because the effects of Roman state power had incentivized such movement. Now, the conclusions to be drawn from just these two examples should not be pushed too far, since one can find evidence from both empires for indirect and direct state power in the making of “artificial” cities.³⁹ Nevertheless, the tomb towns near Chang’an did become very large, and the *vici* and *canabae* in the Danubian frontier zone did come to form a very extensive urban network, so these two examples effectively illustrate the different tendencies of state power, and its wider effects on urbanization, in the two empires.

3. URBAN-BASED ADMINISTRATION

Empires may be seen as states characterized by a dominant center that rules over a number of subordinated peripheries. Though size is not itself a defining feature of empire, most empires, including the two under examination here, laid claim to extensive territories. The challenge of controlling these territories and their inhabitants was especially acute for premodern states, since technological limitations and the unremitting problems of time and space militated strongly against the assertion of direct control over widely scattered subjects. Imperial rule, as a result, has tended to be wide in spatial extent, but shallow in social depth. One way for premodern states to manage large territories was to control the most strategic spaces within them, among which cities, as economic, political, and cultural points of concentration, were especially critical. Most premodern empires, therefore, were organized in a cellular way, with cities serving as the key nodes in a large-scale administrative network. The Han and Roman Empires were no exception to this pattern, but once again, the operation of centralized state power in and through cities was quite different.

In the second century CE, at the height of its imperial power, the Roman state fielded about two hundred high-ranking civilian administrators in its provinces. These officials did not administer the provinces by themselves, of course, but were assisted by staffers, seconded soldiers, and slaves, bringing the total number of Roman administrators (broadly defined) in the provinces up to about ten thousand. This is still a remarkably small number for an empire of some 60 million

39. The garrison towns of the northwestern frontier in China (see Erickson et al. 2010: 145–52; Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2010: 182–3), for example, may well have grown up (at least in part) through voluntary relocation to these areas, and there is some evidence (difficult to quantify) for coercive population transfers in the Roman Empire (see Alcock 1993: 142–5).

inhabitants.⁴⁰ Though Roman provincial administration was rationalized under Augustus, and though a protobureaucratic structure did emerge over the course of the first two centuries CE, the central state never managed to impose direct control over its subjects.⁴¹ Instead, it devolved a number of key administrative tasks, especially the maintenance of order and the collection of taxes, onto semiautonomous local governments, and in particular onto the local elites who dominated them. In exchange for these vital administrative services, without which the empire could not have functioned, these local elites were often rewarded with Roman citizenship, an important marker of status that also conferred a range of legal privileges, and with an implicit promise of armed support in case of local insurrections against their authority.⁴² This systematic collaboration between the central state and local aristocrats, from which both sides benefited, was the foundation of Roman imperial stability in the first two centuries CE.

In its dependence on local elites for the day-to-day management of its realm, the Roman state was typical of preindustrial empires, in which systematic collaboration between central and local elites was the norm.⁴³ The one major exception to this otherwise dominant pattern in premodern history is imperial China, in which the state managed to govern its far-flung territories more directly, and with a higher degree of centralization, than any comparable political system. Two points should be stressed. First, the total number of imperial administrators in the Han Empire was on the order of 130,000, with some 100,000 distributed throughout the empire's 103 commanderies and kingdoms, and another 30,000 or so in and around Chang'an.⁴⁴ This is over ten times the size of the Roman imperial government. In one well-attested commandery (Donghai, in the south-east), the central government managed to field between 60 and 107 officials in the larger counties (governing about 10,000 households, or 40,000–50,000 persons), and between 22 and 86 in the smaller ones.⁴⁵ The second key point, even more relevant to the main argument here, is that imperial officials at all levels of the Han administrative system—from the central administration and the commandery and kingdom administrations all the way down to the county level—were centrally appointed. That this highly centralized governing structure, well

40. For the number of high-ranking officials, see Hopkins 2009: 184; cf. Eck 2000: 238–65 for a general overview of administrative personnel in the middle Roman Empire. The numbers imply a ratio of one administrator for every six thousand subjects (and one senior administrator for every three hundred thousand subjects).

41. For the rise of a protobureaucratic system in Rome, see Eich 2005; for a comparative perspective, see Eich's chapter in this volume, chapter 4.

42. Clear treatments of this exchange are in Reynolds 1988 and Brunt 1990: 267–81, 515–17. Further discussion is below.

43. See, e.g., Eisenstadt 1963: 115–221; Kautsky 1982, esp. 132–43.

44. These figures are extrapolations from the detailed administrative information contained in the Yinwan documents (see below, nn. 45–6), and are broadly consistent with the testimony from written sources (especially the *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu*). With a total population in the empire of 57.7 million, the ratio of imperial officials to subjects would be 1:428 (see Loewe 2004: 70).

45. Loewe 2004: 49. The ratio of imperial officials to subjects implied by these numbers is anywhere from 1:374 (107 officials governing 40,000 persons) to 1:833 (60 officials governing 50,000 persons).

known from later periods of Chinese imperial history, was also in place during the Han period can be inferred from a series of documents unearthed in the village of Yinwan in the Donghai Commandery.⁴⁶ From these documents it is clear that officials posted to the counties and nobilities of Donghai were not local men, but came from outside the districts in which they served. If such a system was pervasive throughout the Han Empire—and there is no reason to believe that Donghai was unique in this regard—then we may conclude that even at the level of local administration, the central regime managed to administer its territories and to govern its subjects directly via centrally appointed imperial officials. There is no real parallel in any other premodern empire.

When it comes to the place of cities in the Han and Roman Empires, the organization of urban-based administration represents perhaps the starkest contrast in the operation and application of state power in the two imperial states. The difference does not lie so much in the capacity of the two states to extract revenues from its respective subjects, since centrally appointed officials in the Han Empire and local elites in the Roman Empire will have been equally motivated (and advantageously positioned) to channel resources away from the central state and into their own pockets.⁴⁷ Instead, the difference lies in the spatial distribution of, and central control over, the institutions and processes that produced social power.⁴⁸ Both states, as we have seen, depended on cities to rule their respective territories, but whereas the Han state managed to exercise some influence over local affairs, through its imposition of outside officials onto local communities, the Roman state, at least during the early and middle empire, could not effectively limit the autonomy of local elites, and so had little ability to interfere in municipal affairs on an empire-wide basis. As a result, the Roman state could never achieve the same degree of control as the Han state over these critical nodes of social power. How this fundamental difference in the development of the two empires came about, and how it relates to the larger issue of social control, is the topic to which we now turn.

The distribution of social power in the Han and Roman Empires—an index, as I suggest here, of the relationship between state power and urbanization—was rather differently configured in these two imperial systems, as the case studies above have shown, with major and long-lasting effects on the ways in which cities did and did not serve as instruments of social control in each of the two empires. This key difference in the distribution of social power, and the corresponding difference in the relative capacities for social control possessed by the

46. Discussed in detail in Loewe 2004: 38–88; for a brief summary, urging caution in generalizing from the situation in Donghai, see Loewe 2010b: 308–11. For local administration in general, see also Bielenstein 1980: 90–113.

47. So Scheidel 2009b: 19; for more detail on the dynamics of revenue collection in the two empires, see Scheidel's chapter in this volume, chapter 5.

48. I refer to "social power" in the sense developed by Mann 1986; cf. Noreña 2011: 10, 322–3.

two states, can be explained in part by the divergent histories of state formation out of which these two empires grew. Let us consider each imperial state in turn.

In the case of the Han Empire, the roles played by elites within cities, and the place of cities more generally within the larger sociopolitical structure of the imperial state, were ultimately the products of large-scale political and military changes that took place during the Warring States period (481–221 BCE).⁴⁹ The main engine driving these changes was a revolution in military mobilization. Following the collapse of effective monarchic authority at the end of the Western Zhou Dynasty, in the first half of the eighth century BCE, a handful of rival states in and around the North China Plain came to engage in sustained, internecine warfare. Most continued to deploy relatively small forces, no more than ten thousand strong, made up of nobles and their retainers fighting from chariots. But several states, especially Qi and Jin, began to draw on larger segments of their populations and, following the lead of the Wu and Yue states from the Yangtze River valley, to field larger infantry armies equipped with superior armor and iron weaponry. No state went further in its development along these lines than Qin. By the second half of the fourth century BCE, following a series of reforms implemented by Shang Yang in the 350s, the Qin state could put massive, centrally commanded armies, numbering (perhaps) in the hundreds of thousands, into the field against its competitors.⁵⁰ This manpower advantage proved decisive. By the end of the Warring States period, Qin had defeated all its rivals and consolidated its power over a vast territory.

Qin's military victory was enabled by a much deeper transformation in the relationship between state and society in early China. The basic mechanism by which Qin successfully mobilized not only its capital population but the rural peasantry as well was a simple trade whereby those who served in the infantry were rewarded with small plots of land, enough to sustain individual households, in exchange for their military service and the payment of taxes. This trade was systematized both through the large-scale division of land into rectilinear blocks, which maximized the amount of land under cultivation, and through the conversion of military districts (*xian*) into the principal units of local administration.⁵¹ As a result of these arrangements, peasants achieved a relatively stable income and a position in society that was no longer dependent on the dictates of local elites, and the Qin state built its formidable war machine. Especially salient for our purposes is the deleterious impact of this exchange on the old nobility. For in the new order forged by the more successful states of the Warring States period, above all Qin, city-states no longer held a privileged place in the political and

49. For what follows, see Lewis 1990, esp. 53–96, 1999, and 2006: 30–50; Hui 2005: 64–87; Chang 2007a: 40–64; Rosenstein 2009, esp. 24–8, 40–5.

50. For Shang Yang's reforms, see also Bodde 1986: 34–38.

51. For the practicalities of agriculture in the Han period, see Nishijima 1986: 551–74; for the process of registration and military recruitment at the district level, see Loewe 2010b: 312–3.

administrative apparatus of the central state, and local elites, already deprived of their military function, lost authority even in their own cities, increasingly replaced for day-to-day administration by agents appointed by and loyal to the monarchic regime. A direct result of imperial state formation under the Warring States, in other words, was the near eradication of the urban-based nobility of the Eastern Zhou period, and the gutting of cities as independent bases of social power.⁵²

The Han Dynasty was the heir to this military revolution and the institutional framework that went with it. This is the larger historical context in which the case studies presented above should be situated. Chang'an could be purpose-built as a new royal capital with no rival, in part because there were no competing cities with similar concentrations of power and authority. The central state could aggressively resettle populations and create entire new urban systems, as in the string of mausoleum towns outside of Chang'an, because it wielded such direct control over its urban subjects. And the monarchic regime could penetrate deeply into municipal affairs, in particular through the imposition of centrally appointed officials in cities and towns, because the local elites were not strong enough vis-à-vis the central state to defend their civic autonomy. That cities in the Han Empire tended not to function as independent bases of social power is nowhere more clear than in their cityscapes and urban fabrics, largely devoid, as they were, of monumental expressions of the power and authority of local elites, as Lewis's chapter in this volume (chapter 7) conclusively demonstrates. Not only did state power have a direct impact on the dynamics of urbanization in the Han Empire, then, it also worked to limit the power and autonomy of local elites, which must have turned cities, as a result, into relatively effective instruments of social control for the central state.

By contrast, cities in the Roman Empire did tend to function as independent bases of social power, and local elites did represent a significant counterweight to the authority of the central state. The high degree of civic autonomy conceded to municipalities in the Roman Empire is a strong indication of the continuing social power of these cities' local elites, as was their practice of advertising their own power and status through public buildings and the provision of public entertainment for local populations.⁵³ The Roman case is similar to that of Han in that the place of cities and local elites in the wider structures of empire can be attributed in large part to Rome's prior history of state formation. The axial moment in that history was the violent implosion of the

52. The old nobility was not wholly eliminated, of course. Though the old families had lost most of their independent political authority by the end of the Warring States period, some of them managed to retain their landed wealth and local status. See discussion in Ch'ü 1972: 160–65.

53. For the contrast with Han cities, see (again) Lewis's chapter in this volume, chapter 7. Bibliography on municipal building, public entertainment, and civic benefaction in Roman cities still begins from Veyne 1976; for more recent analyses, see, e.g., Lendon 1997: 84–89; Zuiderhoek 2009; Noreña 2011: chapter 5.

republican system of government at Rome and its replacement, under Augustus and his successors, of a dynastic monarchy, a political transformation that broadly coincided with the cessation of large-scale imperial expansion and the establishment of a more rational governmental apparatus and a more stable tributary regime.⁵⁴

For our purposes, the most relevant feature of the new order that arose under Augustus, which brought stability to the Roman Empire for almost 250 years, was the empire-wide collaboration between central state and local elites discussed above, in which the latter oversaw local administration and the collection of imperial taxes in exchange for status markers (especially the Roman citizenship), the implicit promise of armed support, and the possibility, for those who were particularly well positioned, of promotion to the imperial administration. This arrangement, the result of what Scheidel in this volume (chapter 5) refers to as a “grand bargain,” suited local elites, on the one hand, because it allowed them to reinforce and indeed enhance their standing in their own communities. And it suited the central state, on the other hand, since in this way it could administer its far-flung subject populations indirectly and inexpensively, and devote the bulk of its material resources to the maintenance of a large, professional standing army, which guarded the empire’s frontiers and provided some internal policing.⁵⁵ By any reckoning, the Roman army was a fundamental mechanism for central control over the territories and resources of the empire, and a key to understanding its stability and longevity. And the long-term maintenance of this potent instrument of coercion was only possible because municipal elites carried the burdens of local administration and the collection of taxes. But from the perspective of central state power, the grand bargain that underwrote this “military-tributary complex” came at a rather significant cost. For unlike their counterparts in the Han Empire, local elites in the Roman Empire continued to wield some independent power and authority, and as a result, cities continued to operate as partly independent bases of social power. In this respect, some distinctive features of the Roman Empire that are normally seen as effective ruling strategies, such as the devolution of administrative responsibilities onto municipalities and the concession of Roman citizenship to local elites, can actually be interpreted as signs of the relative weakness of the central state and of its inability to impose its will on its subject populations. As long as both sides in this grand bargain perceived it as working in their own interests, it functioned smoothly, especially during the middle empire (ca. 70–180 CE). But by the fifth century, when local elites no longer saw the advantage of “buying in” to the social and political order of the central state, and (in effect) stopped paying their taxes, the

54. For the coincidence of these political and structural shifts at Rome, and their wider implications for the history of the early empire, see Noreña 2011: 10–14, 322–4.

55. For the internal policing functions of the Roman army, see now Fuhrmann 2011, esp. 201–38.

system began to collapse, and the imperial regime was powerless to bring them back into the fold.⁵⁶

In brief, the Roman state, as a result of its dependence on cities and their local elites, had neither the infrastructural capacity nor the sort of institutional framework necessary to shape urbanization and urban life directly and on an empire-wide scale, and so had less control than did the Han state over the distribution of social power within its empire. In contrast with the Han Empire, therefore, cities in the Roman Empire did not really function as effective, “top-down” instruments of social control for the central state.⁵⁷

This conclusion has at least two major implications for our understanding of the Han and Roman Empires and their respective aftermaths, neither of which can be pursued in depth here. The first concerns the relationship between the different modalities of state power discussed in this chapter and their variable effects on the tempo and scale of urbanization in the two empires. For one major difference in the two cases is the explosive growth in the total number of cities in the Roman Empire. Between around 300 BCE and the middle of the second century CE, the number of cities in the Roman Empire ballooned from roughly 2,200 (2,258) to just over 3,100 (3,118), a 38 percent increase that took place mainly in the western half of the empire.⁵⁸ This is a dramatic shift in settlement patterns that does not seem to be paralleled in the analogous region of the Han Empire, the Yangtze River valley, which was similarly devoid of urban networks prior to the consolidation of central authority under the Qin and Han. It is true that the ecologies of North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and the west European continent were more favorable than those of the Yangtze River valley to large-scale urbanization, at least in a premodern context. But this pronounced discrepancy certainly creates the impression that state power in the Roman Empire served as a greater impetus to urbanization than did state power in the Han Empire, from which one might infer that the indirect operation of state power, while less effective as a mechanism for converting cities into instruments of social control, was nevertheless a greater catalyst than the direct operation of state power to the creation of cities.

The second important implication from the conclusion of this chapter concerns the longer-term development of state institutions and state power in Europe

56. The collapse of central authority in the fifth century CE, especially in the western empire, is a big and complex topic, with a very large bibliography; for the particular issue highlighted here, i.e., the changing balance of power in the competition between central state and local elites over a limited pool of material resources, see the lucid treatment in Wickham 1984.

57. With respect to social power in the Roman Empire in general, cities did of course function as powerful vehicles for the maintenance of social control (see, e.g., Whittaker 1997), but it was a social control that served the interests of an empire-wide aristocracy, not those of the central state itself. The temporary convergence of these two overlapping but ultimately discrete sets of interests, a defining feature of the “high” Roman Empire, is a key theme of Noreña 2011, esp. 245–324.

58. These figures, which represent a “high” count, come from Noreña in progress a (see above, nn. 10 and 21). The “low” count numbers are 958 (300 BCE) and 1,274 (mid-second century CE) cities, which represents a 33 percent increase.

and China, which began to diverge significantly from the sixth century CE onward. Several factors have been cited in order to explain what Scheidel and others have called “the first great divergence” between Europe and China, a measure of the dissolution or regeneration of central state power in the two macroregions.⁵⁹ The difference in the relationship between state power and urbanization in the two empires, as explored in this chapter, should be added to this list. For despite being characterized by several of the same structural weaknesses as the later Roman Empire, especially in terms of the refusal of large landowners to pay their taxes, the central institutions of the later Han Empire, including centralized rule through cities, were eventually reconstituted in the North China Plain, under the Sui (581–618 CE) and especially Tang (618–907 CE) Dynasties, in a way that was not paralleled in western Europe, which remained politically fragmented following the collapse of central Roman authority in the fifth century CE. This was perhaps the ultimate consequence of the difference between the direct and indirect operation of state power in urbanization in the Han and Roman Empires.

59. See in particular Scheidel 2009b, and his chapter in this volume, chapter 5.

Public Spaces in Cities in the Roman and Han Empires

Mark Edward Lewis

CITIES played a similar role in the Roman and Han Empires. In both they were the primary administrative centers, the sites for large-scale handicraft production, and the crucial links for all significant trade. For purposes of political control and economic action, the cities were the key centers of the empires. Indeed it would not be inaccurate to say that both empires were networks of cities that relied on the surrounding countryside for foodstuffs and related resources, but in which all higher-level activities were concentrated in the cities. Both empires were also characterized by the overarching importance of their imperial capitals, which served as the ultimate center of their respective worlds, and as a microcosm of each empire's principles of organization. Despite these similarities at the basic, functional level, there were several major differences between the nature of cities in the Roman world and in that of the Han. Moreover, these differences were interlinked, so taken as a coordinated set or structure they indicate certain major distinctions between the two empires. Because we lack any reliable information about the lives of the urban lower classes in Han China, this discussion of the differences between the urban societies of the two empires will deal entirely with the upper classes.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

I take for granted the basic similarities between the roles of cities in these two great early world empires, and will focus on the differences that characterize the manner in which each state sought to define its relations to the world it dominated, and to the past from which it had emerged. To summarize these differences, Roman cities were defined by a recurring cluster of major building types employed in the activities that defined the Roman ideal of civilization. Such

1. On the absence of such information, which could only come from archaeological work with a focus quite different from that which characterizes Chinese archaeology, see Razeto 2011: 26, 176, 193, and 260.

buildings included baths, theaters, arenas for combat sports, circuses for chariot racing, and temples to the gods and the emperors. They thus were all intended for public use and mass assemblies. The buildings were constructed of stone, and were paid for by the conspicuous charity of either the ruler, above all in the city of Rome itself, or in other cities of local elites who usually formed the local government. The rulers and local elites thus asserted their status at least in part through providing venues for public gatherings and the enjoyment of public spectacles, at which the patrons themselves might put in appearances before the crowds who enjoyed their benevolence. As was demonstrated by the fundamental importance of the buildings that they erected, these elites served to define the city as a distinct social form that was central to imperial Roman civilization.

These elites, and the urban social form that they embodied and controlled, were the direct heirs of the earlier world of city-states that had structured the civilizations of both Greece and Italy, and out of which the Roman Empire had directly emerged. The importance of this urban historical heritage was marked not only by the essential function of the elites who defined the city but by the manner in which major events in the histories of leading cities were built into their structures. This was particularly true of the city of Rome itself, which was constantly rebuilt to incorporate new elements to celebrate the sequence of its rulers and their achievements. This history of Rome that was built into its physical structure was devoted, above all, to Roman military achievements, and the political centrality of these achievements thus became a major element in the layout of the city and the manner in which it would have been experienced.

Han cities, and above all the imperial capital, were defined by an entirely different set of interlinked characteristics. First, construction was almost entirely of packed earth and of wood. In contrast with the Greek and subsequent Roman ideal of proclaiming the “eternity” of the city through its construction in stone, Han cities were self-consciously marked as transitory phenomena built of perishable substances. This insistence on the city as newly created and not the product of an extended past was particularly central to the imperial capital. Writings of the period described the capital as the creation of the newly established dynasty, which meant that it should not have any history, or that its past could be ignored. This attitude toward the past was the exact opposite of that which was built into the structure of Rome. Although it does not yet figure in Han writing, the theme of the ruined and abandoned capital would also become a standard literary topos in later dynasties. While regional capitals were more clearly tied to their respective pasts, such ties did not figure in the imperial order and, as I will discuss below, served to diminish the status of those cities.

While Roman cities were defined by a set of buildings for public use and assembly, all public buildings in Han China were designed and exclusively reserved for the use of the agents of the central court who were appointed to administer a

given urban space and its hinterland. Sealed off behind walls, the “public” spaces were defined not by their openness, but instead as sites reserved for a particular group of privileged individuals. In this way they reproduced the spatial logic of power that defined the emperor (see below). To the extent that there was a formally recognized urban elite, it consisted of the appointed officials who were allowed the privilege of entering the official spaces. There were local elites defined by wealth, property, and status, but these had neither official status nor any legal mode of public action that would sanction their position. This absence of designated urban elites who were the “natural” elite of their particular cities grew directly out of the systematic dismantling of the city-based elites who had controlled China in the Spring and Autumn period (771–481 BCE) but who were swept away by the rulers of the emergent territorial macrostates in the subsequent three centuries of the Warring States period. This different historical trajectory of the earlier city-states in the Chinese world from that in the Mediterranean helps to account for the fact that the historical heritage of cities played no role in their position within the Han political order, while it remained central to the major cities of the Roman Empire.

The Han rejection of the idea that cities were to some degree the autonomous outgrowths of their own distinctive pasts was reinforced by the idea that all local or regional ties resulted in intellectual limitations and partiality that had to be suppressed within the imperial order. In a system where the imperial state claimed power through its transcendence of the particularist ties of the kin group, the village, and the regional world of the earlier Warring States, cities as natural or organic entities tied to their hinterlands and controlled by their indigenous elites had no place. Regional cities, like all the elements of local societies, became part of the imperial order only by escaping from the bonds of their own immediate environment, and by joining the encompassing political order composed of the ruler and his servants.

This difference to a certain degree is best expressed in the nature of the political capitals within the two empires. The Roman Empire was, as its title implies, an extension of the city of Rome itself. The story of how this small walled town gradually swallowed up first its neighbors, then central Italy, then the rest of the peninsula, then the western Mediterranean, and then the Greek-speaking world and finally pushed north into Gaul, the Balkans, and (briefly) Germany is a tale of continuous expansion in which a single city gradually swallows the world. Even within the imperial state the ruler still held to many of the forms and patterns of earlier republican government, and the “senate and people of Rome” continued to be cited as the core of the state. Within that world empire, the city of Rome remained uniquely privileged, even when its rulers no longer came from Rome or even spent much time there.

The Han Empire, in contrast, was a purely dynastic creation, without any privileged urban center. When the state was founded by a man of humble origins

from the southern state of Chu, but who was himself not a political actor within any existing state, there was a debate over where to locate the court, and the decision to opt for a site just to the south of the earlier Qin capital was by no means a foregone conclusion. The Han Empire was, as various figures remarked in its earlier years, an empire “of the Liu family” which as such was not tied to any particular place. The absence of an urban history, the absence of an “indigenous” elite, and the idea of the capital as a creation of the ruling house were all directly linked to this historical background of an empire created not through the extension of any existing state based in an existing capital, but through the successful establishment of a ruling house that came politically “out of nowhere” and whose position was justified through the absence of ties to any locality.

2. CITIES AND THEIR PUBLIC BUILDINGS

As the capital of a world empire, the city of Rome was distinguished by a unique set of buildings and of other constructions.² Underlying many, if not all, of these buildings was the principle that power and status in the Roman world, and throughout the whole of the classical Mediterranean world, were generated through the sheer force of spectacular display.³ Such display took many forms: sculpture, coinage, visual entertainments, and even the persons of rulers. However, in the urban context the single most important mode of display was the erection of large public spaces and building complexes in which crowds could assemble and enjoy either individual activities or collective entertainments usually provided by the same people who had erected the buildings. In the case of Rome, the emperor himself generally provided such complexes, buildings, and spectacles, and their provision was a basic form of imperial authority.

The most important sites and objects of display in Rome were the series of forums that defined the social and political center of the city.⁴ The earliest of these, the Roman Forum, had evolved under the Republic and contained such important public buildings as the Regia (associated with the early rule of the kings, and then with the office of the pontifex maximus), the Temple of Vesta (and the vestal virgins), the Curia (meeting house of the Senate), the Temple of Castor (commemorating in 496 BCE the vision of Castor and Pollux after a battle), the Comitium (where one of the citizen assemblies met), and the nearby speakers’ platform or Rostra (decorated with the bronze rams of ships captured in the First Punic War). While the Forum also served as a commercial center where business was transacted and money lent, it increasingly became the site of great

2. On the physical building of Rome under the Republic and the empire, see Stambaugh 1988; Aldrete 2008: chapters 2, 3, 8, 9, and 11.

3. Bell 2004; Fredrick 2002. I have found particularly valuable in this regard Tuck 2009.

4. In addition to the entries under “Forum” in Stambaugh 1988 and Aldrete 2008, see Anderson 1984; LaRoca 1995.

urban spectacles, and came to be jammed with honorific statues, shrines, arches, columns, and other monuments commemorating Roman triumphs.

Under the empire this area was progressively extended by new forums sequentially created by Julius Caesar (still technically under the Republic in 46 BCE), Augustus (2 BCE), Vespasian (75 CE), Domitian (dedicated by Nerva in 97 CE), and Trajan (113 CE). These new public spaces provided law courts, temples, and more areas for commercial activities, and also served to announce to the people who gathered there the achievements of the rulers who created them. Probably the most notable example of this was the celebrated Column of Trajan, which recorded the complete history of his Dacian Wars and which was placed at the center of the forecourt leading to his forum.

In addition to these large public spaces with their associated buildings erected to celebrate individual emperors, other monuments to imperial triumphs also lined the streets of Rome from its gates to the center, in what Steven Tuck calls “an armature of celebration.”⁵ The most important of these monuments were the triumphal arches, ultimately more than one hundred in number, that were placed along the traditional route of triumphal processions, and which also clustered in key locations near the Circus Maximus or at either end of the Roman Forum.⁶ These arches were intended to preserve in stone, and to thus make eternally visible and memorable, the ephemeral event that was the triumphal procession.⁷ Both before and after the great age of triumphal arches, Roman victories were also commemorated in the aforementioned Rostra with the bronze rams of captured ships, triumphal columns also decorated with such rams and other trophies such as captured shields or arms, and eventually great triumphal columns—such as those of Antoninus Pius (placed outside the walls of the city), the aforementioned Column of Trajan, and the related column commemorating Marcus Aurelius’s German campaign.

In addition to all these public buildings and monuments to Roman military triumphs, the city of Rome was also marked by numerous buildings created by emperors as gifts to their people, buildings wherein the people of Rome were expected to find diversion and pleasure. One of the most notable of these was the great Colosseum built by the Flavian emperors on the grounds of the notorious Golden House constructed by Nero. This huge amphitheater, which effectively served to return to public use the terrain illicitly monopolized by Nero, served as the setting for numerous public entertainments including animal hunts, gladiatorial combats, and mock battles. Such entertainments served a wide range of purposes, including commemorating military victories, celebrating the geographic range of the empire by bringing exotic animals into the city, displaying

5. Tuck 2009: lecture 26 (“Imperial Arches, Columns, and Monuments”).

6. The most detailed and valuable discussions of this form of monument are Brilliant 1987; Kleiner 1985.

7. For a critical assessment of this key institution, which in the arches became part of the urban fabric of Rome, see Beard 2007.

Roman justice through the public execution of criminals (and later of Christians), and creating public experiences in which the crowd—ranged in public seating that displayed the social ranking of the city's population—could come together with their ruler and directly receive imperial largesse.⁸

A second major public building for mass entertainment built by an emperor was the Circus Maximus, which was devoted to chariot racing.⁹ Such races were the most frequent and popular form of public entertainment in Rome, with the Circus Maximus seating up to 250,000 spectators. It was centrally located, where Romulus had supposedly held the first competitive games, and lay along the standard route for triumphal processions. Seating was free and open, with men and women of all classes allowed to mingle. The course was lavishly decorated with columns and sculpture, offering the populace a clear sense of luxury as well as the excitement of the races. All the major races, some of which were associated with religious festivals, were sponsored by the emperor and his family, who often themselves sat on display in a special box reserved for their use. The chariot teams themselves were controlled by four factions that developed a fanatical following among the Roman population, and the choice of emperors to publicly support one or another faction had political ramifications.

Another category of public building devoted to entertainment for the masses was the theaters.¹⁰ While adapted from the Greek model, both in architecture and type of plays, the Roman theater steadily shifted in the direction of an emphasis on spectacle: employing lavish special effects, privileging comedy over tragedy, often using slapstick, developing more popular genres such as mime and pantomime, and allowing women on the stage who frequently enacted stories of romantic liaisons and even sex. This emphasis on spectacle and entertainment made the theater a site of popular assembly that was open and attractive to all elements of the population. The first theater building in Rome was constructed by Pompey the Great at the end of the republican era, and a second was projected by Julius Caesar, although only completed by Augustus's nephew Marcellus.

A final category of public building created by rulers for the use of the urban populace, although not a site for scheduled gatherings to watch mass spectacles, was the baths.¹¹ These huge complexes, which Tuck describes as more like large spas than simple bathhouses, were decorated with marble and had floor mosaics, statuary, fountains, and gardens. The walls, with glass windows and sometimes ornamented with scenes from mythology, rose more than one hundred feet. These "spas" provided a convivial setting where Romans could gather to bathe in waters

8. Bomgardner 2000; Welch 2009; Tuck 2009: lecture 13 ("Amphitheaters").

9. Cameron 1976; Humphrey 1986; Futrell 2006; Tuck 2009: lecture 21 ("Roman Circuses—Arenas for Chariot Racing") and lecture 22 ("A Day at the Races").

10. In addition to the pages cited in the indexes of Stambaugh 1988, see Scodel 1993; Slater 1996.

11. Fagan 2002; Yegül 2009; Tuck 2009: lecture 27 ("Imperial Baths in Rome—Spas for the Masses") and lecture 32 ("Local Baths and Roman Bathing Culture").

of different temperatures, exercise, listen to music or public lectures, get a massage or haircut, or enjoy snacks and wine. They were open free to all people, so that the different classes could mingle, establish or reinforce networks, and pursue their respective businesses, without in any way blurring social distinctions. In this way they provided a clear demonstration to all Romans of the benefits of the empire, and of the extraordinary generosity of its rulers.

Whereas the city of Rome was thus covered with public spaces and buildings erected by its rulers as places of free assembly for the urban populace, the cityscape of the Han capitals—Chang'an and Luoyang—presented an entirely different picture.¹² While the two cities varied considerably in their details, they were both characterized by a clear distinction between the “public” spaces—palaces, government offices, government workshops, temples, granaries, and armories—and private ones, which consisted of residences, storehouses, and places of business. The only sites where private individuals could freely assemble were the markets, and this area was rigorously policed and restricted in its hours of opening. In contrast with the city of Rome, where the gathering of crowds and their controlled encounters with the emperor were a matter of policy, public spaces in Han China were defined precisely as excluded spaces into which entry was granted only as a privilege.

This point requires brief elaboration, as it demonstrates a fundamental difference in the practice of authority between the Roman world, and the West more generally (as well as India), and that of China. In Rome, as was demonstrated in the huge amount of money and energy devoted to the construction of public spaces and to the large-scale gathering of people, a ruler was marked by his ability to assemble crowds of which he would be the center of attention. This generation of power through the display of the self to deliberately assembled crowds was replayed at lower levels of Roman society. Thus elite Roman houses at their front had entryways and public rooms that were decorated with military trophies, any public honors, and busts or death masks of eminent ancestors. In these rooms the paterfamilias received business and political associates. Perhaps the most important ritual here was the *salutatio*, at which the numerous clients of the household's head gathered outside the door at dawn, and were received by him into the atrium, which served as the major reception hall. The patron would receive all his clients, who were clad in their formal togas, conduct his business with them, and give and receive favors. On days that the Senate or local council met, the clients would accompany their patron to the forum in a massed display of his power and influence. Major family rituals, such as weddings and funerals, would also be staged in these front rooms.¹³ In short, the structure and use of the

12. On the layout of the Han capitals, see Lewis 2007: chapter 4, 2006: 169–86; Hung 1995: chapter 3; Wang 1982: chapters 1–2.

13. On the structure and sociopolitical functions of the elite Roman house, see Clarke 1991; Wallace-Hadrill 1994; McKay 1975; Tuck 2009: lecture 6 (“The Roman House—Space and Decoration”).

house constituted part of it as a public space in which the head of the household assembled his followers. The larger the crowds that could be gathered, the greater the power and prestige of the family.

Power in Han China, on the other hand, was generated on a principle of exclusion, in which outer zones and open spaces were by definition lowly, and one ascended in power, status, and sacrality by moving inward. This principle of the supreme power of the hidden and the inner had emerged in the structure of early Chinese ancestral temples, in a world where the ancestors were the ultimate source and locus of power. It was extended further during the Warring States period, when rulers increasingly sought security and a mystique of power through hiding themselves behind walls. Accounts of the First Emperor emphasize his obsession with remaining unobserved, and the term “forbidden” as an epithet for the ruler’s spaces emerged as early as the Han Dynasty. In this world all people had to pass through a series of walls to reach a site of power, with control becoming more rigorous at each gateway and the number of people allowed to pass being steadily reduced. Thus the Han emperor marked his power by reducing the number of those who could come into his presence, or even look at him from a distance, to the smallest possible number, and bestowing his presence as a supreme honor on a chosen few. As in Rome, elite Han households reproduced the structures and values of the political world, with sequentially reduced admission as their organizing principle.¹⁴

Further comparative insights can be gained by seeking out Han versions of some of the features of the public buildings in imperial Rome. One notable feature is that of military trophies. While piles of captured weapons were erected as trophies in Spring and Autumn China, evidence of such practices in the Warring States is lacking. The First Emperor of Qin, however, *did* erect around his capital at Xianyang a series of monuments to his triumphs. First, as he conquered the other Warring States, replicas of their palaces were constructed to the south of the city, on the northern bank of the Wei River. These replica palaces, symbolic microcosms of the defeated states, were filled with musical instruments and singing girls from those states, and connected by covered walkways along which the emperor could move in secret. He also forcibly resettled the most powerful families of the defeated states to tend his tomb, his summer palace, and stone inscriptions that proclaimed his triumphs. Finally, he melted down captured weapons and cast them into the statues of twelve giants, apparently representing immortals whose appearance signaled divine blessings for his victories.¹⁵

The contrasts of these war trophies with those in Rome are notable. First, most of them were not even public, but self-consciously hidden away as appendages

14. On the spatial principles underlying the Chinese household, and their ramification in the political world, see Lewis 2006: 113–20.

15. Lewis 2007: 89. On the earlier military trophies, see Lewis 1990: 25–6.

of imperial authority. Second, although they celebrated military triumphs, the palaces, people, and statues themselves exhibited no explicitly military aspect. Instead they were subsumed into a broader project of symbolic and ritual depictions of the newly united realm in its cosmic aspect, symbols that included palace complexes patterned on the constellations. Third, and most important, the Han account of these activities treats them as evidence of megalomania, and such memorials of triumph were largely absent from both Han capitals. This suppression of the theme of military triumph continued in the ritual and building programs of later Chinese empires, as one element of the policy of the central courts of denying the fundamental role of military power in their states.

This contrast in the public use, or nonuse, of war monuments as an element in the cityscapes of the respective capitals reflects a divergence in the roles of the imperial rulers. The powers of the Roman princeps were ultimately based on his military role, and the term *imperator* named a specifically military function. The emperor was supposed to command armies in the field. Indeed several of the emperors who ascended to the position without military experience—Caligula, Nero, and Commodus—were notorious for attempting to establish their *virtus* as performers on the stage or in the arena rather than in the field of combat, and were sometimes consequently treated as being insane.¹⁶ In China, on the other hand, emperors were supposed to delegate military command, just as they delegated civil administration. While founders of dynasties, apart from the First Emperor, invariably rose through military action, and a second emperor of a dynasty would sometimes also have played a military role in its foundation, such facts were regarded as inconvenient necessities that were not noted in public performance or commemoration.

The same contrast figures in the role of animal combats and gladiatorial games in the two empires. Whereas in Rome these were part of regular public display and embodied in the great monument of the Colosseum, in Han China such events were elements of private entertainment or symbolic ritual for the court. Literary records state that Han emperors staged combats between animals, or between people and animals, at special pens in their palaces. More importantly, large ceremonial hunts staged in the great imperial hunting parks outside the capital were also occasions for having people fight wild animals, sometimes using only their bare hands. Similarly, a few records indicate that staged fencing matches, often fought to the death, were held for the ruler's entertainment in the late Warring States period or early empires.¹⁷ Thus just as military monuments in early imperial China were largely reserved for the ruler and the court, so were all forms of military rituals or the closely related rituals of violence that dramatized the emperor's mastery of the natural world. Offering

16. Tuck 2009: lecture 24 ("Emperors as Performers").

17. Lewis 1990: 150–7, 2012.

the common people a spectacle of violence, in which the state displayed the killing of hostile or alien elements, was not regarded as an acceptable aspect of government in Han China.¹⁸

While the rituals of violence celebrated by the rulers of Han China were not opened to public spectatorship, they do not seem to have been kept secret, nor did they indefinitely remain a privilege. The clearest evidence of this comes from Eastern Han tomb art, which depicts staged combat between animals and men, and more rarely the combat of two men armed with swords or spears.¹⁹ The scenes in these tombs are generally understood to depict the ideals of life for the Eastern Han elite, ideals that they sought to realize in the afterlife through the power of images. Consequently, the depiction of such combat in the tombs suggests that this aspect of the emperor's lifestyle, with or without official sanction, had become a more general element of elite existence. Similarly, literary accounts describe large, collective hunts that resembled those of the emperor being staged by groups of leading families from major regional cities.²⁰ However, neither the artistic nor the literary evidence suggests that such activities ever became open, public spectacles to be witnessed by large crowds.

While the rituals of violence that were performed as public spectacles in Rome were reserved as privileged, private viewing for the Han elite, there is no evidence in the Han period for any version of the other types of activity performed in the designated public buildings of Rome—theater, chariot racing, and bathing. Varieties of musical performance, juggling, and tumbling are depicted in art and literature, but these appear as private pleasures of the elite. Versions of such spectacles may also have been available for poorer people in some locations, such as taverns, but these fall outside the evidence produced by the Han elite. While our sources' silence on the entertainment available to the common people might simply reflect the class bias of those sources, it seems clear that the gathering of large crowds that such activities entailed in Rome was clearly unacceptable to the Han government. Since the ruler avoided any public self-presentation, and since any recognition of the city as a social form that should be enacted in collective gatherings had been suppressed in the preceding centuries (see below), any form of large-scale public assembly was banned in the name of public security.

The one exception to this general ban on crowds was the official, urban markets. These areas were marked as public spaces through two forms of construction: a central, multistory tower that housed the officials in charge and a grid of stalls in which shops were arranged by the category of goods that they sold. They also followed the pattern of Han public spaces in that they were placed behind walls and open only at stipulated times that were signaled by banners and drums.

18. On the political uses of the organized spectacle of violence in the Roman world, see, among others, Plass 1995; Fagan 2011; Köhne and Ewigleben 2000; Futrell 1997.

19. Lewis 1990: 150–7.

20. Lewis 2009c: 89–91.

The beating of drums to signal the opening of the market in the morning and its closing in the evening provided the earliest known form of a major feature of imperial Chinese urban spaces in that a “soundscape” fashioned by the government marked the rhythms of the day.²¹ According to Qin law, records of all transactions were to be submitted to officials, so commercial interactions all brought the participants into regular contact with the agents of the government.

The Qin and Han regimes also drew people into their public realm as an element of commercial transactions through their emphasis on the standardization of weights and measures. Both governments created objects—including weights, ladles, and measuring vessels—that defined the standard units of weight, length, and capacity (particularly of grain). These units were established according to a decree of the First Emperor, and the Qin state made a point of emphasizing the state’s role as a creator of universal standards by inscribing the decree—either complete or abridged—onto the objects that were then used to guarantee standards in the markets. The Second Emperor made an adjunct decree on the same topic, and this was added to many of the objects produced (in some cases even recalling old objects to government workshops to add the new inscription). The large number of such objects that have survived among the relatively scanty remains of the short-lived Qin regime suggests how important to the state this practice was. Studies have collected a dozen inscribed bronze measures of capacity, more than sixty inscribed weights for steel-yard scales, numerous cast iron weights with inscribed bronze plaques, special inscribed plaques of bronze and iron that were made to be attached to pottery, and numerous pots impressed with the inscriptions. Of the more than one hundred fragments of such pots, the vast majority used seal impressions to produce the inscription, thereby guaranteeing a correct reproduction of the text. Interestingly, the pots leave blank spaces where the characters for *huang di* “emperor” should appear, indicating that the title itself was to be treated as too sacred to be mentioned by commoners.²² The Han Dynasty continued to produce standardized units of measure, but they did not routinely add inscriptions, since the institution of standardized units in the markets had been inherited from the previous dynasty.

As Charles Sanft has argued in his recent “habilitation thesis,” the large number of such examples and their dissemination on such relatively humble media as clay pots show a self-conscious policy of the early imperial Chinese regimes to disseminate awareness of the state and its actions, to create a shared body of knowledge and standards that would unite all the subjects of the empire, and to encourage the identification of commoners’ personal activities and interests with the actions of the state. Thus while these governments were generally

21. Lewis 2009a: 89–90 describes the use of drums to signal the opening of residential wards in Chang’an at the beginning of the day and their closing at the end. Hung 2005: chapter 4 describes a later version of the same phenomenon.

22. Sanft 2014.

suspicious of the gathering of crowds, and did not encourage them in such numerous settings as did the Roman Empire, they did avail themselves of the gathering of large numbers of people in the market, and the circulation of material objects that took place there, to spread an awareness of and commitment to the positive actions of the state, and thereby to instill the idea of a public realm.

As the one site where large crowds could legally gather, the market also was the privileged site for communication between the state and the people. The more civil form of such communication consisted of the posting of public proclamations, or in exceptional cases the public display of objects or texts for which a response was requested. More brutally, the market was also used for public punishments, both beatings and executions. The head or sometimes the entire corpse of those who committed particularly serious crimes was also put on public display there. As in the uses of the inscribed measures, these policies made the market a privileged site for disseminating the idea of a public realm.

One final constructed site in which the Han state made itself known, and around which it gathered large numbers of people, was the line of Western Han imperial tombs erected just to the north of Chang'an. As Sahara Yasuo has recently pointed out, all capitals in the Qin and Han Empires were distinguished from other cities through the systematic building of extramural architectural complexes that marked the unique character of the city, often through ritually marking its links to the greater cosmic order.²³ In the case of Chang'an this role was played by a row of large grave tumuli, some of which were flanked by subsidiary burial mounds of leading officials or generals, that were erected as imperial tombs in the form of artificial mountains to the north of the Wei River. Each of these tumuli had wooden buildings for the performance of rituals, and all of these were maintained by the populations of cities that were specially built to provide money and labor for that purpose. Following a policy initiated by the founder of the Han Dynasty, these cities were populated by the forcible resettlement of the leading families from all the other regions of the empire, as discussed in chapter 6. This had the twin benefits of removing local elites from their places of residence and providing an ever-increasing pool of talented and wealthy people who were directly attached to the imperial court. Several of the cities grew to a very large size, and their total population outstripped that within the walls of the capital. The people in these cities became the single largest pool for recruiting officials, and they also gradually formed the basis of a distinctive capital culture.

The integrated complex of the imperial tomb mounds, ritual buildings, and associated cities thus formed a distinctive mode of public space. They were public in at least two ways. First, they were embodiments of imperial majesty and its links to celestial power that were visible to the populace of the capital, and indeed came to define the natural setting of the city. Second, they were the site of

23. Sahara 2002: 88–100.

large-scale gatherings of population that were tied to the tombs, and through them to the imperial system of which many of these people became leading servants. In this way the tumuli and their cities came to constitute an alternative center to the imperial court, but one that in contrast to the court was open to public viewing and the site of collective gatherings.

The other cities of the Roman and Han Empires featured some of the same public buildings, although never so numerous or large as those in the capitals. In the case of the Roman Empire, the city-state was considered the natural unit of organization and administration. Indeed, it could be said that the Romans viewed their empire as a collection of semiautonomous city-states under the supreme city-state of Rome.²⁴ This meant that although there were tremendous variations in the degree and form of urbanization across the different parts of the empire, there remained certain standard public buildings or spaces that were to be found in any respectable city.

In many ways, the cities of the West, which often emerged in the wake of Roman imperialism and were based on Roman colonies or forts, provide the clearest idea of Roman urbanism. In contrast to Rome itself, which had grown organically around the features of its landscape, the colonies and later foundations attempted to erect a square or rectangular outline, surrounded by walls and crisscrossed by streets in a strict orthogonal form. The city's forum was to be placed in a central location, ideally where the main north-south and east-west roads crossed. The forum itself was also to be a rectangle, laid out parallel to the main streets, bounded by a portico for protection from rain and sun, and lined by the major public buildings. The main public buildings, always located in the forum, included at least a law court, a local senate house, and usually a temple for civic religion. The cult of such a temple would be dedicated to the Capitoline triad (Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva), a major indigenous deity in Greco-Roman form, or the emperor and his family. Other temples would be scattered through the city, and tombs lined the major roads leading in and out of the city. As part of the Roman world, such cities would also contain at least one bathing complex, theaters for mime and drama, amphitheaters for blood sports, and circuses for chariot racing. Water from aqueducts that fed fountains, baths, and possibly more mundane purposes was also crucial. Finally, the main streets often featured porticoes, monumental gateways, and triumphal arches.²⁵

Regional cities in the Han Empire, although not documented from archaeological excavations like those from the Roman Empire, were likewise basically reduced versions of the capital. They shared common structural elements with Chang'an: outer walls to define the city, inner walls to separate the political city of palaces and offices from the residential areas, and a regulated market where

24. Drinkwater 1987: 354.

25. Levick 1987; Drinkwater 1987; Salmon 1970; Bradley and Wilson 2006.

crowds were allowed to assemble for the controlled exchange of goods. They also operated on the same principle of excluding ordinary people from entry into the political city, thus restricting their exchanges with agents of the state to the markets and, when necessary, the law courts. The markets, as depicted in tomb art, likewise had multistory towers for officials and grids of single-story buildings or stalls for merchants.

3. PUBLIC SPACES AND THEIR BUILDERS

The lesser cities in the Roman Empire and those in the Han Empire significantly differ in the patterns of patronage that made possible the construction of their respective public buildings and spaces. In the case of the Roman cities, the buildings that define the public sphere were largely built through the conspicuous public charity provided by members of the local elite. The heads of leading local families provided the money to build baths or amphitheaters, and this public service was permanently recorded in inscriptions carved into stone on some visible part of the building. Indeed, membership in the urban elite of the Roman Empire ultimately hinged on the provision of such charity, which was described by Max Weber as “liturgies.”²⁶ Thus the great structures that defined the cityscape became embodiments and demonstrations of the local social order. Equally significantly, this urban social order, marked in the array of buildings patterned on Rome, was fundamental to the process of “Romanization.” In the case of the Roman forts and camps that evolved into cities in the frontier provinces, the orthogonal street plan and the presence of the buildings that defined Roman urban culture were to some degree an imposition from the imperial center. However, more commonly the claim to be part of the Roman Empire that was marked through the erection of the distinctive public buildings was deliberately undertaken by ambitious local notables who exalted their own local status through affiliation with the patterns provided by the great city of Rome. Such demonstrative generosity facilitated election to a major post, or in some cases it was a duty of holding an office to contribute specified amounts of private wealth to public buildings or the staging of rituals or entertainments therein.²⁷

While creating public buildings and their inscriptions was primarily an aspect of the careers of the highest members of society, Louise Revell has argued that such sites must also be read more broadly as places wherein people from every level of society enacted or redefined their status.²⁸ Thus ordinary male citizens

26. Weber 1946: 165.

27. The shifting emphasis in contemporary scholarship from the idea that Romanization was imposed from the center to the idea that it was actively embraced and carried out by local elites for their own purposes was given its classic formulation in Millett 1990. For criticisms of this book, focused on challenging the idea of a simple Roman-native dichotomy, see Woolf 1998; Mattingly 2006.

28. Revell 2009: chapter 5.

would not contribute buildings, but they would use them. They participated in political and religious rituals as members of the audience, formed part of the crowd at games and races, or participated in forming social networks at the baths. As members of the political public, their participation was essential to ratify the status of their betters. This pattern is fundamental to the political role of all public spaces in the Roman Empire, where the assembly and participation of people with certain rights, and often their physical placement in terms of their status, was central to the functioning of the empire.

In addition to the essential participation of less honored groups in the rituals and performances in public spaces, certain activities that defined those spaces—notably the offering of public charities and the associated display of inscriptions—provided models by which formally inferior groups could also publicly assert themselves. Thus while women could not participate in the political crowd, they formed part of the public at games and baths. Those from particularly rich or good families could gain offices as priestesses and even make public benefactions that were permanently recorded in stone. Similarly freedmen, although barred from the highest offices, could if wealthy enough engage in benefactions, most notably sponsoring games, that would likewise be memorialized in stone. Many inscriptions also memorialized the lives or actions of military men, identified by their ranks and units. While not strictly public buildings, the inscribed funerary monuments that lined the major roads into cities could also be large and decorated with reliefs or sculptures, thereby giving a public aspect to the lives of those they memorialized. In this way public architecture became more than constructs of bricks and marble erected by and for the highest elite. Instead they served as spaces in which people from every social level, gender, and age group could negotiate a place within the urban existence that was fundamental to being Roman.

Revell's demonstration of how the social uses of public spaces in Rome were not limited to the simple reiteration of received hierarchies and honors is particularly useful for thinking about the parallel issues in the Han Empire. Here all explicitly public spaces were built and controlled by the state's officers, so the sanctioned public realm was formally identical with the sites of state activity. However, just as in Rome, the legally defined public areas provided spaces in which those not formally recognized as members of the elite participated in the latter's actions, and also offered models for the actions of other groups that constituted a *de facto* extended public realm.

This extended public realm can be discerned in at least four aspects: (1) members of the state were economically and socially enmeshed in the world of merchants and nonofficial elites, who could be drawn into the state either through personal ties or through the extensions of the state into economic actions; (2) the Western Han imperial tombs and their associated cities created a public space in which significant elements of the nonofficial elite found a place in the state order;

(3) groups and networks formed through collective activities in the market also found a place in the state order, or as illicit but indispensable extensions of that order; and (4) the administrative actions in the government districts of regional and local cities required the participation of members of local elites, who thus became active agents of the state order without official appointments. I will briefly examine each of these phenomena.

The local power of nonstate elites, whose wealth and influence allowed them to link up with local officials, and even sometimes dominate the latter, was a matter of censure among writers from the beginning of the Han Dynasty. Subsequently, Sima Qian noted such power and influence of merchants as a simple matter of fact, and even described cases in which emperors bestowed honors on merchants and manufacturers for their services to the state. The poetry of the period also remarked on the social intermingling of major merchants and officials or members of the nobility.²⁹

In addition to such brief observations of merchants' political power, some biographical narratives dramatize the social and economic intermingling of officials and leading merchants. Thus the biography of the great poet Sima Xiangru describes how as a young man he stayed in the official lodge as a guest of the city magistrate, who treated him with great respect. Impressed by this treatment, a group of local merchants invited the magistrate and Sima Xiangru to a banquet at the house of one of them. The latter entertained the party with music and verse, which in a famous incident led the daughter of the house to fall in love with him. Their subsequent elopement resulted in a brief period of poverty when the young couple operated a wineshop. Finally, the girl's father was persuaded that for the sake of his family's respectability, and in the expectation of Sima Xiangru's eventual political success, he should recognize the marriage and endow the couple with a substantial estate. Subsequently Sima Xiangru became the leading poet at court and also secured political appointments. Similarly, the biography of Zhang Tang, who became the leading legal official and dominated the court of Emperor Wu for a period, describes at some length how his routine socialization with wealthy merchants led him to draw the latter into his government activities, and to become himself embroiled in their business dealings.³⁰ Thus it is clear that the formation of social networks, marriage alliances, and shared business activities allowed local elites, most notably merchants, to participate in state affairs.

In addition to merchants' participating in the formal public sphere through their links with officials, Sima Qian also argues that economic power in fact constituted a parallel hierarchy of authority. Wealthy local elites, he argued,

29. See, for example, the writings of Jia Yi (d. 169 BCE), Ban Gu, et al. in the *Hanshu* (Zhonghua edition, Beijing 1962: 2244–2249); Sima Qian in Watson 1993: vol. 2: 381, 383–4, 387–95, 440–1, and 450–3 (translated by Burton Watson); and Xiao Tong in Knechtges 1982: 105–7 (Ban Gu, “Western Capital Rhapsody”) and 203 (Zhang Heng, “Western Metropolis Rhapsody”).

30. Sima Qian in Watson 1993: 2: 260–1 and 385–95.

formed an “untitled nobility” that was served by their poorer neighbors in the same manner that the latter served the state’s officials. These wealthy people not only had the power to hire the services of their fellows, and to buy their way out of all official obligations, but they dominated their localities through the influence gained by conspicuous charity.³¹

A final manner in which merchants’ economic activities gained them access to power and status in the public sphere was the Han state’s frequent reliance on monopolies in salt and iron. Families who had risen to wealth through iron smelting were sometimes resettled in areas where they could be more closely supervised by the state, but in these new regions they gained great local influence due not only to their wealth but also to what amounted to their patronage by the state. Even clearer were the cases of Sang Hongyang and other merchants who were appointed to direct the state’s salt monopoly, and who in this capacity came to dominate the central court.³² Thus the shifting boundaries of the state and the economy led to merchants being excluded from and then drawn into the official public sphere, but throughout these changes they continued to wield *de facto* public power and influence.

A second means by which local elites were able to enter into the state sphere was the aforementioned policy of forcibly resettling the most eminent and powerful families from across the empire in the towns built north of Chang’an to maintain the imperial tombs and their sacrifices. These families had originally been the chief powers of the rival Warring States and as such the chief rivals of the newly established Han court, but their new location in the outskirts of the capital soon allowed them to become the most important pool for recruitment into government offices. The importance and prosperity of these cities attracted voluntary immigrants from throughout the empire who became participants in the same semipublic realm. As Sima Qian noted, this immigration, both forced and voluntary, and the relative scarcity of land in the Wei River valley meant that agriculture was not an option for many people, so much of the population in this region devoted itself to trade and manufacture.³³ This primacy of mercantile activities among a population that was also the chief pool for official recruitment shows yet again how the nonrecognized local elite was able to move themselves into the government sphere through shifting their activities into a state-created public space.

The markets were a major form of public space that provided an opening in which people who held no office could informally participate in the government, or develop parallel networks that rivaled those of the state. There were at least

31. Sima Qian in Watson 1993: 2: 447. On charity as a mode of power, both official and unofficial, in Han China, see Lewis 2009b.

32. Sima Qian in Watson 1993: 2: 450–1; see the index entries on “Salt Monopoly” and “Sang Hung-yang” in Twitchett and Loewe 1986.

33. Sima Qian in Watson 1993: 2: 441.

two forms of such illicit powers in the markets, apart from that of the aforementioned merchants. First, leagues of gangsters known as *you xia* often assembled in the markets to engage in gambling, or to recruit new followers among high-spirited youths or butchers. As described by Sima Qian, these gangsters were criminals in times of order, but became important political actors in times of rebellion or civil war. The Han founder himself had been a wastrel youth of the type recruited by *you xia*, as were many of his leading followers. Under the Western Han state, several leading *you xia* gained empire-wide celebrity for their activities as defenders of the poor or as social mediators, and they developed extensive social networks that included many officials. Many *you xia* themselves became officials who were employed to destroy locally powerful families, and some officials who performed similar tasks became gangsters upon retirement. Associations of gangsters in the capital even routinely associated with officials, for whom they provided services as assassins or enforcers, and from whom they received patronage and protection. Thus the gangsters in the market both acted as agents of the state and formed a parallel, competing network of violence-based status and wealth.³⁴

Another type of network that operated in the market was that around the so-called shaman doctors. Many individuals offered services in the markets as doctors, diviners, or both. Several anecdotes describe such people as rivals of, or alternatives to, the officials and the ruler who were supposed to assure proper links between the human and the divine. Government decrees also linked these people with merchants as moneymakers who did not pay their fair share of taxes. Finally, several texts describe them as luring many people into their service, including the disreputable youths who also associated with the gangsters.³⁵ While many of these people were not clearly members of an unrecognized elite, in the manner of the merchants and gangsters, members of prosperous families and aspiring officials did pursue careers as doctors and as masters of the supernatural. More notably, in the Han Dynasty the term “shaman” was also applied to powerful local families who sponsored religious cults as one basis of their power. Thus the term “shaman” in some contexts entailed membership in the nonsanctioned elite, and when they obtained patronage from an emperor, as under Emperor Wu, these people could also move into the state sphere. It is also noteworthy that certain local cults related to those sponsored by the “shamans” were also organized by merchants.³⁶

One final urban public space that provided an opening for ambitious local powers to unofficially move into the state sphere was the local government office. Han officials, even relatively lowly ones as shown in documents from a tomb at

34. Sima Qian in Watson 1993: 2: chapters 122 and 124; Lewis 1990: 89–91; Lewis 2006: 163–5.

35. Lewis 2006: 165–7.

36. See, for example, Wu 1980: 333 and 338–9.

Yinwan, were dispatched from the central court.³⁷ Consequently, most of them knew nothing of the cities to which they came as administrators. In some regions they could not even speak the local language. Therefore, while local government offices were in theory closed to all save those summoned for some legal dispute, in actual practice members of leading local families served in these offices as a permanent subbureaucracy operating together with those sent out from the court. Thus all the state-sanctioned public spaces of the Han Empire also became sites where unsanctioned members of local elites or other social networks were able to work themselves into, or pattern their actions on, the officials who were supposed to be the only true elite.

4. CITIES AND THEIR PAST

One final major feature that distinguishes the public spaces of Rome and Roman cities from those of the Han Empire is their radically different relationship to the past. This, in turn, is due to the different relations of the two states to the local urban elites who dominated the social life of the cities. To briefly summarize, the public spaces of Rome, and to a lesser degree those of the other cities of the empire, proclaimed their ties to an ancient past, and to a certain extent portrayed the city as an unfolding of the history between its point of origin and the present day. Closely tied to this vision of the city as an enduring, evolving entity defined through its past is the idea that any city's indigenous elites, the heirs of that past, are definitive of the city.

The Han capitals, in contrast, were presented as the creations of the dynastic house, with references to the past simply serving to announce previous failures and disasters that the Han Dynasty had overcome. The Han house, emerging from a humble background, had no history. Moreover, its first capital had no usable past, being the site only of one outlying Qin palace. Consequently, the capital's history began with the foundation of the dynasty, and the primary physical expression of its endurance across time was the steadily lengthening row of imperial tombs. These marked not a history of the city, but a genealogy. While other cities had longer histories, these did not tie them to the Han state, but rather marked their earlier existence as the expression of limited, local powers, or as the local bases of the Qin state. As I will discuss below, the Han house came to justify its rule through its ability to transcend all local ties and limitations. Any appeal to the past of a Han city simply displayed its limited, local nature that the ruling house and its agents claimed to transcend. For the same reason, any appeal to a local population contradicted the principles that now defined Han power. Consequently, elites were formally recognized only to the extent that they became elements of the Han state, which they did only by taking up office in the service of the emperor.

37. Loewe 2004: 38–88.

The one notable exception to this deliberate eschewing of a past in the building of the capital was the incorporation as gate guardians of the aforementioned metal giants cast by the First Emperor of Qin from confiscated weapons. However, this seeming exception is not truly significant for several reasons. First and foremost, the “past” embodied in these statues amounted to little more than a generation at the time of Chang’an’s initial construction. It was as though the city of Augustan Rome had no traces of a history prior to the life of Julius Caesar. Second, these statues were not permanent features of a cityscape, but rather mobile objects. The last surviving statue was moved to a subsequent capital, a theme commemorated in poetry as yet another version of the motif of the ruined or vanished capital. Finally, as discussed below, the capital of the First Emperor was itself a creation largely *ex nihilo* that was consciously built to mark a break with the past, as part of the First Emperor’s vision of himself as the perfect or sage ruler who had brought an end to history.³⁸ Thus these traces of a very recent past, objects that commemorated a vision of a total break with all prior history, do not challenge the argument presented here.

Major elements of the identification of the city of Rome with a history built into its public spaces have been discussed above. The forums commemorated their builders, as well as major events enshrined in temples or notable sites found therein. Similarly, the monumental arches eternally recalled the memory of specific triumphs, and the great public amphitheaters, circuses, baths, and theaters also recalled the fame of those who had built them. This commemorative, historical function of public buildings was clearly expressed through the practice of carving inscriptions to proclaim the glory of those who had endowed their construction. Lesser historical claims during the imperial period were made on less important buildings or on family tombstones.

In addition to these sites that proclaimed their history, and thus formed an architectural history of the empire, Rome’s public spaces also commemorated events going back to the mythic foundation of the city. Thus on the Palatine Hill, where the Romans believed that Romulus had founded his fortified settlement, there was a Hut of Romulus overlooking the Circus Maximus and the old site of the Forum Boarium, where Romulus and Remus had supposedly been washed up by the river. When Augustus built himself a house in Rome, he erected it near the Hut of Romulus in order to mark himself as a second founder. Rome’s inhabitants could also look at an outcropping in the same area where Romulus had supposedly divined about the foundation of the city, and at the base of the hill was the cave where the she-wolf had supposedly suckled the infants. A monument in the Roman Forum commemorated the spot where Romulus had ascended to heaven. Other buildings there—such as the Regia, the Temple of Vesta,

38. For a detailed discussion of the First Emperor’s vision of his reign as a radical break in history, and of himself as a “messianic figure,” see Pines 2014.

and the Curia—were identified with the era of the kings. A Temple to Castor in the Forum commemorated the supposed assistance of this divinity and his brother in an early battle. The Temple of Concordia, also at the Forum, was founded in 367 BCE to commemorate a pact between plebeians and patricians, and expanded in 121 BCE to celebrate the elite's victory over the Gracchi. Another spot in the Forum was a fenced-off depression known as the Lacus Curtius. This commemorated the heroism of Marcus Curtius, who had supposedly at that spot in 362 BCE leaped fully armed on horseback into a pit that had miraculously opened up in the Forum, and which equally miraculously then closed.³⁹

This is only a sampling of the historic sites distributed across Rome. The same approach to the past characterized the literature of the early empire, many of whose masterpieces dealt with Roman origins and history. The literary account of Rome's ancient past had begun with the poet Ennius (d. ca. 169 BCE), whose historical epic *Annales* traced the history of Rome from the fall of Troy to the censorship of Cato the Elder in 186 BCE. Vergil's *Aeneid* likewise traced the founding of Rome, and found mythic precedents for the victory of Augustus. In the same era, Livy wrote his history narrating the story of Rome from before its foundation in 753 BCE down to Augustus. Even Ovid in his *Fasti* situated accounts of many events in Roman history within his calendar of festivals and of the sites in Rome where they were celebrated.⁴⁰

While no other city of the empire had the density of political inscriptions that figured in Rome, many (particularly in the Greek East) were older and enjoyed great cultural and historical prestige marked in the traces of their pre-Roman past. More importantly, all Roman cities, whether original foundations or cities with histories, featured the same pattern of major public buildings that marked their *romanitas*, and stone inscriptions recording the origins of those buildings. Thus every city in the Roman world could participate in the empire only through the generation of public sites and the inscriptional record of the history of its founding.

The building of links with the past into the Roman cityscape was also expressed in the insistence on erecting cities of stone. This pattern of construction, adopted from the Greek world, was proclaimed as a pattern for imperial cities in Augustus's famous remark, "I found the city made of brick and left it made of marble."⁴¹ The building of the city in stone sought to make it, and the inscriptions that elaborated its construction, eternal. They were admired and read by later

39. These and numerous other cases of the highlighting of historical sites in Rome are noted throughout Stambaugh 1988. See the index entry under "Rome," which alphabetically lists all major sites as subheadings.

40. On the links of Roman literature to the history of the city, see Quint 1993: chapters 1–4. On the politics of Ovid's *Fasti*, see Barchiesi 1993; Newlands 1995.

41. Suetonius, *Augustus* 28.3, cited in Stambaugh 1988: 51. Augustus provided the details of this transformation in his *Res Gestae*, itself preserved on inscribed stones in several temples dedicated to his cult. See Brunt and Moore 1967: 27–9 and 61. For a detailed analysis of the impact and significance of Augustus's rebuilding of Rome, see Favro 1996.

citizens of the empire, and survived into later eras as sources of materials for construction, objects for meditation on and artistic depiction of the transience of glory, and ultimately as sources for modern historians and archaeologists.

The capitals of the Qin and Han states, by contrast, along with the other cities of those empires, were built of wood and packed earth. In the case of the capital, these materials became linked with the literary and intellectual theme of political evanescence. While no one could speak of the death of the emperor or the end of a dynasty, everyone knew that these were inevitable, and the theme of the fallen capital became a major poetic topos. The capital, as a creation of the dynasty, collapsed together with it. Created by decree out of nothing, it returned to nothing when those decrees lost their force. Thus the Qin capital, Xianyang, was burned to the ground by the rebel Xiang Yu, Chang'an devastated by a civil war at the end of the Western Han era, and Luoyang destroyed by the ambitious general Dong Zhuo at the end of the Eastern Han period.⁴²

This pattern of not tying the imperial capital to any past was not only a result of the physical evanescence of the capital but also of the ideology of the creation of empire. Although he was a member of a royal dynasty, and made offerings to his ancestors, the First Emperor also insisted that his achievements were unique in history and marked a clear break with the past. Thus the inscriptions that are our best evidence for the First Emperor's self-understanding depict all of history prior to his reign as unending bloodshed and chaos, and all earlier non-Qin rulers as rebels and criminals. The First Emperor also, as Martin Kern notes, "instead of praising the ancestors' accomplishments and by this, indirectly, accumulating his own merits, . . . goes straight ahead and presents his own achievements." Yuri Pines has elaborated this point in even greater detail, and placed it within the political philosophy of the period.⁴³ While the career of the First Emperor was routinely treated as a scandal by those who came after him, he still provided an unacknowledged model for all subsequent emperors, and even his acts of "megalomania" often became institutions.⁴⁴ In this case, a break with the past became a routine feature of any dynastic foundation, which usually entailed people rising from absolute or relative obscurity to create a new state that was invariably marked by a new capital, new rituals, and new laws. Even after later Chinese pieced together a theory of a succession of legitimate dynasties (*zheng tong*), each dynasty was still a new creation rather than being, in the manner of Rome, the spatial extension of some earlier state.

While the unprecedented achievement of creating a unified empire and the institutionalized novelty of all subsequent dynasties and dynastic capitals explain the decision not to appeal to the central city's history, the political rejection of the

42. Lewis 2007: 100–1.

43. Kern 2000: 146. The complete, annotated texts of the inscriptions are in Kern 2000: 10–49. Pines 2014.

44. Lewis 2007: chapter 3 (especially 70–4).

past of other cities has two further explanations. First, whereas Rome itself originated as a city-state, and its empire emerged in a world where city-states remained fundamental units of culture and administration, the era of city-states in China had largely come to an end some 250–300 years before the creation of the empire.⁴⁵ More importantly, the rise in China of the great territorial states, each under a single supreme ruler, had depended on the elimination of the urban-based nobility that had ruled in the preceding centuries. Thus the polities that in the Warring States era (481–220 BCE) controlled the area that later became China had been able to achieve power only by eliminating the cities as independent sites of power, and socially eradicating the indigenous urban elites. Given its history, Rome carried forward the Senate and elements of the old republican elite as bases of the emperor's role, which originally consisted of holding simultaneously and permanently a range of republican offices. The other cities of the empire transformed their old ruling bodies into vehicles of administration and their nobles or wealthy, active citizens into imperial elites. In contrast, Chinese urban elites had been eliminated as political actors in the process of creating the Warring States, and the Qin and Han Empires were the institutional heirs of that elimination.

The second major reason why the regional cities of the Han Dynasty and their elites were not formally recognized as political entities is that Chinese intellectuals and political actors came to understand social hierarchies as being built on a pattern of progressive encompassment, in which authority derived from the superiority of an all-embracing whole over limited parts.⁴⁶ In the late Warring States period both political philosophers and administrative documents justify the power of the new territorial states over the eclipsed city-states by insisting that the limited scope and small geographic range of the latter condemned their rulers and elites to a benighted partiality. This partiality was explained as the sway of “custom” (*su*), under which people were bound by the limits of accumulated habit and impoverished experience. In contrast, the reforming rulers of the expanding states, and their philosophical assistants and doubles, were defined by an encompassing vision that, at its limits, drew the entire world into a single realm. This culminated in the grandiose claims of the First Emperor to have brought peace and prosperity to the farthest reaches of the earth, and to the lowest creatures thereon, all of which he gazed upon from the peaks where he placed his inscriptions.

This idea was carried forward into the Han Empire, when many thinkers used the rubric of “custom” derived from geographic limitations to explain Qin's nature and its ultimate failure. Each of the former Warring States, as described by Sima Qian, appeared under the Han rule as a limited, regional culture trapped by

45. On the nature and history of the city-states of China and on their disappearance, see Lewis 2000b, 1990: chapters 1–2.

46. The different levels and forms of this idea are worked out in Lewis 2006.

the restrictive customs resulting from its geography and history.⁴⁷ This discourse proved particularly useful for a dynasty that was not itself tied to any prior state. Originating in the south, briefly placing the capital at Luoyang on the eastern edge of the flood plain of the Yellow River, and finally opting for the mountain-ringed security of the old Qin heartland, the Han rulers seemed to rise above links to any specific state, and thus offered themselves as a center around which the enlightened and public spirited could escape the narrow limits of earlier patriotism to form a transcendent, universal realm. The earliest institutional expression of this idea was the forced transfer to the new capital of the leading families from all across the empire. Lesser members of old state elites who were left behind, or ambitious elements that arose to fill the political vacuum, fell beneath the limits of a public realm that was now identified with the transcendent realm defined by service to the universal emperor.

5. CONCLUSION

The Roman and Han Empires had many common features. Uniting the whole of the world with which they were familiar, and even extending their frontiers to draw in more distant peoples, they resembled each other in size and structure. As Walter Scheidel observes, it was at the city level that the most significant differences remained.⁴⁸ However, even at the city level there were many common features, in that cities were the densest concentrations of population, the “central places” that offered the finest goods and the most sophisticated modes of living, the administrative centers around which the states were structured, and the key loci for trade and craft production. However, some key differences remained, and I have focused on the chief area of meaningful contrast, the different definitions in the two empires of a public sphere and its public spaces.

The contrast is clearest at the level of the capitals. The Roman Empire was, as the name suggests, the empire of the city of Rome, while the Han Empire was, as its founding ruler and others remarked, the empire of the Liu family. The public buildings, monuments, and spaces of the city of Rome provided a definition of *romanitas* marked by the use of stone amphitheaters, circuses, theaters, bathing establishments, and temples to the gods and emperors, all marked with inscriptions celebrating their builders. They also provided a history of the city of Rome from its founding to the present day, marked above all by sites associated with Romulus and the kings, and by the memorial arches and columns that eternalized the victories of the emperors. The particular history chosen for public display also defined the emperor primarily as a military figure, and secondarily as a

47. Lewis 2006: 202–12.

48. Scheidel 2009b sketches the features of similarity and convergence. The observation on cities is in Scheidel 2009b: 19.

great public benefactor. It was closely linked as well to the centrality of the army as a separate, professional institution that created the empire and frequently provided the core of its administration.

The Chinese capitals—Xianyang, Chang'an, and Luoyang—did not stand in the same relation to their empires. First, the simple fact of their multiplicity was significant. While the Roman emperors gradually drifted away from the city, and Constantinople ultimately emerged as a second capital in the Greek-speaking East, the sort of debates over the location of the Han capital, its shifting to mark the embrace of a new style of rule, and the spatial redesign of the cities to support that new style were all quite impossible in a city-based empire like Rome. The Han capitals were defined by the very lack of history and the nonuse of enduring building materials, which made it possible for the dynasty to lay out the city's walls, streets, palaces, and offices according to its own programs. The absence of the array of open public buildings and spaces in the Han capitals equated the public sphere with the state. It likewise identified the Han emperor's benefactions with the peace, order, and hierarchy that he established, in contrast to the creation of a beautiful and enduring cityscape, and of open spaces where people assembled to bask in the ruler's glory, as in Rome. The eschewing of military monuments—after Qin's unsuccessful experiment—also marked the decentering of the army, an enduring if frequently falsifying feature of Chinese empires. In any case, the absence of triumphal monuments clearly signaled the nonparticipation of emperors, with the exception of founders, in military affairs.

At the level of the regional cities, the chief difference was that the Roman Empire remained based on city-states, in which the indigenous urban elites continued to serve on councils and were expected to make regular contributions to local administration and to the public life of the cities. The chief expression of the latter was the duty and honor of sponsoring public buildings, or performances held in those buildings, through conspicuous charities (or "liturgies") that were recorded in stone inscriptions on the buildings in question. In this way, just as in the capital, the great stone public buildings that defined the urban structure were the physical embodiment of the political and social order. Rome displayed the achievements of the emperors (and the earlier heroes of the founding and of the Republic), while the regional cities displayed the glories of their own indigenous elites.

The regional cities in China, like those in Rome, were lesser images of the capital. As in the capital, the public sphere was equated with that of the state, as marked by the walls that divided off political portions of the city where the government offices and the regulated markets were located. As in the capital, the local history of the city was not an issue of public pride or celebration. The Warring States, from which the Chinese empires emerged, had created themselves through a deliberate policy of eliminating the city-based nobility that had dominated China from around 800 to 500 BCE. The new states were constituted around

a single supreme ruler who relied on the mobilization of mass peasant armies to extend his power. Within the states the most crucial step was the political elimination of the urban elites, who had previously controlled the city-states, and their replacement with appointed agents of the ruler. This suppression of indigenous, local elites—articulated in the critique of partiality and inherited custom—was carried forward into the empire in the form of policies of systematically moving local elites to the tombs of the Han emperors, and under Emperor Wu of engaging in a virtual war with those local elites who were left behind. The absence of any model of imperial gift giving in the form of public buildings, and of any city-based elite who sought to establish their status through a similar public beneficence, resulted in the establishment of a public realm limited to those spaces that were walled and occupied by the state.

While both the Roman and Han Empires thus crafted their cityscapes to display the nature of the ruler, the role of the army, the place of local elites, and the defining characteristics of civilization, in neither empire were the public realms thus defined successfully restricted to their ideal models. Instead, in each empire the public spaces established for the power and glory of the rulers and the elite also provided zones in which less favored elements of the population were able to find a role for themselves, whether licit or illicit, in the public order. Likewise, the actions by which the formally recognized elites of the two empires established their public eminence also provided models that were imitated or adapted by people of lower rank to advance their own power and status. Thus the appeal of the cities—which the rulers and elites had for their own glory crafted as sites of splendor and sophistication offering the best of everything—inevitably turned them into the places of choice for those excluded from the formal hierarchy, but who fashioned alternative urban networks and systems of power from which they, too, could benefit.

Ghosts, Gods, and the Coming Apocalypse

Empire and Religion in Early China and Ancient Rome

Michael Puett

THIS chapter will explore the religious aspects of emperorship in ancient China, with comparisons drawn with Rome. In both China and Rome, the formation of the early empires occurred in tandem with the emergence of claims of divine rulership. Also in both cases, these claims were hotly contested, with several religious movements in the empires refusing to accept the emperor as divine, and with other movements trying to make even stronger claims concerning the potentially divine aspects of humans. The ways that the subsequent debates concerning the proper form of rulership for an empire played out over the next few centuries had dramatic implications for the nature of the two empires.

My goals in this chapter will be to analyze why such claims concerning the divine status of the ruler emerged in both cultures during the formation of the empire and to explore the historical implications of the different ways that the resulting debates played out.

1. COMPARATIVE EMPIRES: PAIRED SOVEREIGNS, HUMAN AND DIVINE EMPERORS, AND MILLENARIAN MOVEMENTS

The history of empires in the Roman and Chinese worlds are surprisingly similar. In both cases, the formation of empire involved two key figures: Julius Caesar and Augustus in the Roman case and the First Emperor and Emperor Wu in the second. In both cases, the first of these (Caesar and the First Emperor) attempted to institute an imperial order. Each would be seen by his respective later tradition as a transgressive figure who created the empire but was unable to legitimize it. In both cases, the civil wars that arose after this failure ended with the re-creation of an imperial order by figures who were able to consolidate and legitimize the imperial system initiated by the failed founders. Moreover, in both cases, this legitimation of empire involved claims of divine emperorship. Such claims of divine rulership were new, and in both cases the claims were made in opposition to the religious and political practices of the day. Not surprisingly, the claims were in turn strongly contested.

Also in both cases, millenarian movements began forming in opposition to the imperial system, in both cases involving claims of revelations from a higher, moral deity calling for a repudiation of the existing world and the creation of a new order following the divine teachings. Again in both cases, one of these religious movements became tremendously influential, ultimately becoming a dominant religion of the empire. In the case of the Roman Empire, this religion was of course Christianity. In the case of China, the religion was the Celestial Masters. Thereafter, the religion in question became part of the imperial ideology and, after the fall of the empires, would become institutionalized as a (potentially) independent church organization.

This statement concerning the Celestial Masters may at first seem surprising, so a few words on it may be helpful. When we compare the Roman and Han Empires, one thing that does seem to differ is the fact that the Han Empire falls well before the Roman Empire does. But this is somewhat misleading. It is true that the Han Empire falls in 220 of the Common Era, and it is true that an empire that would successfully unify the realm did not emerge for several centuries. However, the Han was followed immediately by the Wei Dynasty, which formed a major empire that controlled the entire North China Plain. Although it is true that the Wei never succeeded in controlling the southern regions, they certainly did not know at the time that they would fail. In terms of the views at the time concerning imperial projects, the Wei fully saw themselves as continuing (and improving on) the imperial project of the previous several centuries.

The fall of empire in China would on the contrary be better dated to the early fourth century, when the North China Plain was overrun by armies from the steppe region. This was, of course, part of a larger rise of steppe peoples across Eurasia, and one that helped bring about the fall of the Roman Empire as well.

This comparability of chronology for the empires on either end of Eurasia is of relevance to the religious history of this period as well. During the end of the Han Empire, the Celestial Masters formed an independent community in what is today Sichuan. When the Han Dynasty fell, the Celestial Masters looked to the Han general Cao Cao as the figure who had received divine support to begin a new dynasty. Cao Cao's son, Cao Pi, started the ensuing Wei Dynasty, which thereafter accepted the Celestial Masters. Many of the elite of the Wei were converted to the Way of the Celestial Masters. Thereafter, all major institutionalized Daoist movements traced themselves back to the Celestial Masters.

In both Rome and China, this conversion to what had been a millenarian movement fundamentally altered both the nature of the imperial ideology and the nature of the religious movement—and here again in similar ways.

Despite these striking similarities between these two empires at either end of Eurasia, two interrelated points are often made to contrast the two. The first involves indigenous political theories concerning the rise of empire, and the second involves claimed cosmological differences between the West and China.

To begin with the first: In Rome, the introduction of empire involved a self-perceived rejection of the Republic, and it was also seen as something different from the earlier monarchy. And these terms—Republic, monarchy, empire—have continued to underlie political discourse throughout later European history. For well over a millennium after the fall of the Roman Empire, most subsequent European history was to be dominated by monarchies. But repeated attempts were made to re-create an empire along the lines of the Roman (Charlemagne, of course, being an obvious example, and more recently Napoleon and Hitler attempted to do so as well). More recently, attempts to create a republic have been self-consciously undertaken in reference to the Roman Republic (both the French and American Revolutions being examples).

The contrast in political terminology in China is striking. The formation of the empire was as hotly debated in China as it was in Rome. But the empire ultimately came to be called a dynasty like the monarchical dynasties of the past. And this continued subsequently as well. Indeed, there is no term in pre-modern China that can be accurately translated as “empire.”¹ Nor, for that matter, is there a term that could accurately be translated as “republic.” There are certainly terms that can be translated as “monarchy,” but that helps to underscore the point of the potential contrast: for all of the many debates about proper forms of political organization in Chinese history, a monarchical order seems not to have been itself a topic of significant debate. In short, debates about the distinct political orders of monarchy, republic, and empire would appear to be absent in China.

And this brings us to a second (although directly related) point of potential contrast, namely what is often referred to as a cosmological contrast between China and the Mediterranean region. It has often been remarked that in China there was an assumption that the cosmos was a harmonious, monistic system, and that the human realm should thus normatively be a unified, harmonious realm as well.² Thus, because of these cosmological assumptions, empire came to be seen as the norm in China—as, indeed, the natural way of organizing the world—whereas in the Mediterranean region and in Europe in general there was no cosmological assumption that tended to lead toward seeing empire as a norm.³

The goal of this essay will be to explore the cultural debates within which these claims of human and divine kingship developed and to chart an alternate comparative approach to those that would emphasize a radical difference in terms of cosmological assumptions between the West and China.

1. What is often translated as “empire” is in Chinese “tianxia”—“all under heaven.” But this same term is used to describe the order achieved by a monarch from the Bronze Age just as much as it is to describe the order (when achieved) during the Han era.

2. See, for example, Mote 1989.

3. This view is perhaps most influentially argued by Max Weber. See, for example, Weber 1951.

2. THE DOMESTICATION OF THE GHOSTS: DECEASED HUMANS, SPIRITS, AND ANCESTORS IN EARLY CHINESE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

First, a general introduction to early Chinese religious practice. I will focus here on those practices dominant in the Warring States and Han periods (ca. fifth through first centuries BCE), although will turn in a later section to a more historical discussion of how some of these practices changed over time.

Humans were believed to be composed of numerous different energies, souls, and powers. Some of these energies (*qi*) were associated with the emotions of the human, while the souls (the *hun* and *po*) were associated with the personality. Another component was the spirit (*shen*), which is what gave humans consciousness, as well as the ability to control things. While alive, humans would try to cultivate these energies and their spirit, trying to refine them and to keep them within the human body.

The latter point is crucial, because when humans died these energies and the spirit would indeed leave the body.⁴ This was a very dangerous situation for the living. The resulting recently deceased ghosts would tend to become overwhelmed by the energies associated with jealousy, anger, and resentment, all of which would often be directed at the living—in part for the fact that they continued to be alive. Moreover, the spirit, now freed from the constraints of the body, would become all the more powerful. The result would be highly dangerous ghosts who would tend to haunt the living.

Fortunately for the living, the energies of anger and resentment tended to dissipate over time—presumably because the souls associated with the personality of the human also dissipated over time. As these energies dissipated, the spirit of the deceased grew even greater in power, and it also grew more distant from the living. Indeed, it would tend to stay around the earth much less, and would increasingly roam in the heavens above.

The reason for such an abode was simple: the heavens were filled with other spirits (*shen*) as well, including various nature spirits and, most importantly, Heaven itself (also called the Di—God), which many saw as the most powerful deity. These spirits consisted purely of the same spirit that existed, in far less refined and far more diluted form, in living humans. As the spirit of the deceased shed more of the elements from the earth that held it down (the body, the souls associated with the personality), it became more like these other spirits in the heavens—extremely powerful, but also distant and potentially indifferent to humans. And such an indifference could also be dangerous, since these spirits controlled things like the weather. So, from the point of the view of living humans, the acts of

4. For discussions of the afterlife in early China, see Yu 1987; Brashier 1996; Mu-chou 1998; Poo 1998; Cook 2006; Seidel 1987; and Puett 2005 and 2011.

the spirits could seem highly capricious—not because the spirits were filled with the angers and resentments of the recently deceased ghosts but rather because they were relatively unengaged with humans, and thus could send down rains and droughts regardless of the needs of humans.

In short, if the ghosts of recently deceased humans were dangerous in the sense of being potentially angry and resentful against the living, the spirits (both the spirits of humans who died long ago, as well as the other spirits in the human) tended to be dangerous in another sense—highly powerful, but relatively indifferent to the needs of humans. The ghosts were potentially malicious toward the living, and the spirits were (from the point of view of the living humans) indifferent and potentially capricious.

This is the background against which to understand early Chinese religious practices. The problem was clear: humans had to deal with dangerous recently deceased ghosts, as well as powerful spirits who tended to be unpredictable. The goal of early Chinese practices was to transform these figures as much as possible—or at least forge relationships with them—such that they would become more responsive to the needs of the living.

For the recently deceased, the first concern was to separate the personality of the deceased from the spirit. Ritual actions would be undertaken to keep the souls of the deceased with the body, which would be buried in a tomb. The goal would be to keep the souls in the tomb, removed from the living. This would be accomplished in part through ritual exhortations that the souls not leave the tomb. It would also be accomplished by making the tombs places where the souls would want to remain. Things associated with the person in life (including food, texts, etc.) would be placed in the tomb, with the hope that the souls would therefore be all the more tempted to stay there, not rejoin with the spirit and not attack the living.

The later destiny of the souls in the tomb was unclear. One possibility was simply that the souls would eventually dissipate. There was also the possibility that they might be reborn in various paradises—in the western paradises associated with Xiwangmu, for example. Either way, they would be removed from the world of the living.

The fate of the spirit would be different. The living would undertake various ritual actions to transform the spirit into an ancestor. The spirit would be given a tablet in the ancestral hall, a temple name, and a defined time for sacrifices. Each of these would be based not on the personality of the person (which the living hoped would be kept separate, in the tomb), but rather on the place of the spirit in the ancestral lineage. At the proper ritual moments, the spirits would be called down from the heavens to enter the ancestral temple and to be sacrificed to as an ancestor. The ancestor would then be called on to act like an ancestor and thus treat the living as descendants who should be supported. If successful, this would mean that the spirit, shorn of the energies and souls that could be so dangerous, would become a supportive ancestor, using its power to act on behalf of the living.

These attempts to separate the souls from the spirit and to transform the spirit into an ancestor, however, were never seen as being completely successful. For the recently deceased, the spirits would often link up again with the souls and energies, and thus revert to being a highly dangerous ghost, and the more distant ancestors would tend to become increasingly indifferent to the needs of the living. The sacrifices thus had to be given repeatedly, because the process was never complete: the ancestors would always revert to being dangerous ghosts or indifferent spirits, and the living were thus in the position of constantly trying to domesticate them yet again.

3. RELIGION AND POLITICS IN BRONZE AGE CHINA

A key part of understanding the political orders that developed in early China is to see how each (attempt at) a political order appropriated these religious practices. Let us begin with the Bronze Age aristocratic kingdoms of the late Shang (ca. 1250 to ca. 1050 BCE) and Western Zhou Dynasties (ca. 1050 to 771 BCE). And let us again turn first to the dead.⁵

When someone in the royal family of the late Shang era would die, the person would be given a temple name and a day in the ritual cycle to receive sacrifices.⁶ But as one might expect, the rituals were never completely successful, and the ancestors would continue to be highly capricious. Given that the ancestors became more powerful and more distant over time, the types of disasters that would befall the living would often be a good predictor of which generation of ancestors was causing the problems. For example, if someone had a toothache, divinations would be aimed at the most recently deceased set of ancestors to see if one of them was cursing the living. Once the culprit was found, further divinations would be given to see what sacrifices would appease the ancestor in question.

But things like droughts and untimely rains were controlled by higher powers—who were unfortunately extremely unresponsive to human rituals. And the most powerful of the spirits was Di, who was tremendously powerful and also extremely unpliant to humans. The royal house would thus offer sacrifices to the more recently deceased ancestors, who would then be called upon to host the next level up in the ancestral hierarchy. This would continue all the way to the most distant ancestors, who would then host Di himself. The hope was not only to transform the recently deceased humans into ancestors, but to use these figures to create, as much as possible, an entire pantheon of ancestors and spirits who would ideally act on behalf of the royal family. When it worked, there would exist a pantheon of supportive divine figures acting to help the royal family. But, of

5. For an outstanding overview of the Shang era, see Keightley 2000.

6. Smith 2010.

course, often it would not. Disasters would rain down on the living, and the sacrifices would be given yet again.⁷

And what about the nonroyal living families? During the Shang period, we possess only written sources from the royal lineage, but with the ensuing Western Zhou Dynasty we get a great deal more evidence. When the Zhou overthrew the Shang, the Zhou claimed sole access to the highest deity (whom the Zhou called Heaven, rather than Di). After their death, the founders of the dynasty, Kings Wen and Wu, would serve Heaven, and the ancestors of each successive generation would then call on each generation above, ultimately reaching Heaven. The Shang ancestors, of course, were no longer allowed access to the high god.⁸

Already we see hints of how the political order was interwoven with the ritual order in the Bronze Age, and let us now pull back and lay out the overall workings of the political culture of the time. All land and resources seem to have been controlled by aristocratic lineages. The most powerful of these lineages would vie for the title of *wang* (king). Only the royal lineage would be able to trace its ancestral line back to its more powerful ancestors, who would then serve the highest deity. The status (religious and political) of the other aristocratic lineages would be defined according to their relative positions vis-à-vis the ruling lineage. The living nonroyal aristocrats would be granted land and resources by the king to rule on his behalf, and the ancestors of the nonroyal aristocrats would continue to serve the ancestors of the royal lineage in the heavens above.

But the political order contained the seeds of its own downfall. At the beginning of a dynasty, the ruling lineage was by definition at its strongest point—the very fact of its success in overthrowing the previous dynasty demonstrated that it had gained the support of the other lineages. Moreover, when the various lineages were granted land and resources by the ruling house, the recipients of the gifts were usually the very people who had fought with the new king in the conquest of the previous ruling lineage. As the generations went by, however, the nonroyal lineages controlling a given region would have less and less relationship with the ruling family. Over time, the power of the ruling lineage would wane dramatically.

And such a waning was built into the ritual system as well. The ruler's only access to the highest deity was through the lineage sacrifice system—working up the lineage to the founding ancestors. Thus, as each generation went by, the king would get farther and farther removed from the highest deity. The ruling house would thus, over time, lose its connection to the highest deity, just as the ruling house would also lose its power vis-à-vis the other lineages.

As this gradual waning occurred, the other aristocratic lineages would increasingly vie among themselves to see which could gain the support to launch

7. See Puett 2002: 31–79.

8. On the Zhou state, see Li 2008 and 2009.

an overthrow of the ruling family. When a conquest finally became possible, the cycle would repeat itself. Such a political system, of aristocratic lineages overthrowing other aristocratic lineages, became known as the dynastic cycle.

4. THE WARRING STATES PERIOD

The ensuing period of Warring States (fifth century BCE to 221 BCE) involved a rejection of the aristocratic system of the Bronze Age and the emergence of a plethora of different types of social and religious orderings. It will be helpful to outline a few of the alternate approaches that emerged during this period.

5. REJECTING THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

5.1. *The Mohists*

For our purposes, one of the most significant of these alternate forms of order was the Mohists, a small community organized around the teaching of their master, Mozi. The Mohists claimed, contrary to the religious practices of the day, that Heaven was a purely good deity who had in fact created the cosmos specifically for the benefit of humans:

Moreover, there are ways that I [Mozi] know Heaven loves the people deeply. It shaped and made the sun, moon, stars, and constellations so as to illuminate and guide them [i.e., the people]. It formed and made the four seasons, spring, autumn, winter, and summer, so as to weave them into order. It sent down thunder, snow, frost, rain, and dew so as to make the five grains, hemp, and silk grow and prosper, and sent the people to obtain materials and benefit from them. It arranged and made mountains, streams, gorges, and valleys, and distributed and bestowed the hundred affairs so as to oversee and supervise the goodness and badness of the people. It made kings, dukes, and lords and charged them with, first, rewarding the worthy and punishing the wicked, and, second, plundering the metals, wood, birds, and beasts and working the five grains, hemp, and silk so as to make the materials for people's clothing and food.⁹

Moreover, they held, the ghosts of the dead were not dangerous or capricious but were rather entirely beneficent. Indeed, they were organized by Heaven into a hierarchy designed to work on behalf of the needs of the living:

Therefore, in ancient times the sage kings made manifest and understood what Heaven and the ghosts bless and avoided what Heaven and the ghosts detest so as to increase the benefits of all under Heaven and eradicate

9. Mozi, "Tianzhi, zhong," *Sibu beiyao* edition, 7.6b–7a.

the harms of all under Heaven. This is why Heaven made coldness and heat, placed the four seasons in rhythm, and modulated the yin and yang, the rain and dew. At the proper time the five grains ripened and the six animals prospered. Diseases, disasters, sorrows, plagues, inauspiciousness, and hunger did not arrive.¹⁰

Instead of living humans using sacrifices to transform the ghosts into a hierarchy of beneficial ancestors, Heaven has already organized the ghosts into such a hierarchy for the sake of the living.

Since Heaven was purely good and has organized the cosmos and the world of ghosts for the benefit of living human beings, the behavior of all living humans should be based on following the guidelines of Heaven. Accordingly, the Mohists opposed the use of sacrifice by humans to manipulate the spirit world. Doing so, according to the Mohists, would disrupt the proper hierarchy set up by Heaven. The same guidelines held for mourning the deceased.

The Mohists further held that the organization of human society should be modeled on the hierarchy created by Heaven above. The hierarchy on earth should be a pure meritocracy, in which humans would be promoted or punished based simply on the degree to which they follow the divine dictates of Heaven.

These ideas, in which a high deity is purely good, has organized the world for the benefit of humanity, and supports a meritocracy on earth based on the degree to which these divine dictates are followed, will become, as we will see, dominant positions in the millenarian religious movements that would continue to emerge in later Chinese history.¹¹

5.2. *Self-Divinization Movements*

A different reaction to the religious practices of the day can be seen in the emergence of movements aimed at avoiding the postmortem fate of other humans. If all humans already have a spirit within them, and if the spirits in the heavens above are composed of spirit as well (simply far more refined and unencumbered by such earthly substances as a body), then the goal came to be to refine one's spirit while alive.¹² Ultimately, the hope was to refine one's spirit such that one would not die but rather ascend into the heavens directly. One would therefore never be made into an ancestor. Moreover, one could potentially even carry one's soul with one during the ascension into the skies, so that one would become a spirit but with one's personality intact.

Many of these movements increasingly came to be focused on the Great One (Taiyi), which was seen as being more powerful and more primordial than

10. *Mozi*, "Tianzhi, zhong," 7.6a–6b.

11. For a fuller discussion of the Mohist cosmology, see Puett 2001: 51–6.

12. Puett 2002: 80–121.

Heaven.¹³ If Heaven was part of the pantheon associated with the sacrificial practices of the day, the One would be appealed to by those hoping to transcend these practices altogether.

As one could easily imagine, such movements fell under strong criticism. Either the self-divinization was doomed to failure (in which case it was a waste of time to devote oneself to it), or if it did succeed, it would mean one would become autonomous from the ancestral cult altogether.

5.3. *State Centralization*

Certainly the most influential of the movements that critiqued the aristocratic social and religious organization of the time were those that would later be classified under the term “Legalism.” Many of these were based on a strong support for the series of reforms instituted in the state of Qin by Shang Yang, the lord of Shang (d. 338 BCE). The reforms involved an attempt to centralize state control, create a series of laws and punishments that applied to everyone (commoners and aristocrats alike) equally, and create a bureaucracy based on principles of merit rather than birth. The point of these reforms was to have the state take direct control over land and resources and utilize these resources for war.

One of the goals of these reforms was to undercut the power of the aristocratic families that had dominated the previous several centuries of political power. Were it to be successful, it would also mean a rejection of the religious system in which that aristocratic power rested. Successful bureaucratic institutions would ensure the longevity of the state, and would bring to an end the rise and fall of aristocratic lineages (with the related claims of relation with and subsequent distance from Heaven) associated with the dynastic cycle.

6. QIN AND EARLY HAN

These policies were implemented most successfully in the state of Qin, which succeeded in creating an enormous, and extremely well trained, mass infantry army. In 221 BCE, the state of Qin defeated the other states of the period and created a centralized realm. The conquest was a direct result of the Qin having created centralized institutions that were far better at marshaling resources for war than the neighboring states had been able to do.

Upon instituting the new dynasty, the new ruler of Qin did not seek to start a new dynasty along the lines of the Bronze Age aristocratic kingdoms of the past. On the contrary, the new ruler explicitly emphasized the degree to which he was breaking from the past and instituting an entirely new order. To begin with, he

13. One of the first appearances in our extant corpus of the Great One is in the “*Taiyi shengshui*” (“The Great One generates water”), a fourth-century BCE text excavated from the Guodian tomb. The Great One is portrayed in the text as giving birth to the rest of the cosmos, including heaven and earth. See Puett 2002: 160–5.

created a new title for himself—instead of the title of king, he declared himself the first august thearch (*huangdi*; usually translated as “First Emperor”). He proclaimed in his inscriptions to be a greater ruler than any who had preceded him and indeed to be creating a new order altogether:

It is the twenty-eighth year. The First Emperor has created a new beginning [*zuo shi*].

He has put in order the laws, standards, and principles for the myriad things....

All under Heaven is unified in heart and yielding in will.

Implements have a single measure, and graphs are written in the same way....

He has rectified and given order to the different customs....

His accomplishments surpass those of the five thearchs.¹⁴

The ritual system created by the First Emperor underlined this break from the past. He declared himself the First Emperor, to be followed by his son the Second Emperor, and so on—a new dynasty. But far from envisioning a gradual weakening of the dynasty, the First Emperor explicitly declared that this dynasty would last for ten thousand generations.¹⁵ The founder (himself) would not die and become an ever-more distant ancestor to the living. On the contrary, the First Emperor would himself become divinized and ascend to the heavens as an immortal without ever dying. As such an immortal he would become an ancestor to the new order he had created, but instead of being an ever more distant and unreachable ancestor, he would be a living presence for that new order.

Although the Qin empire fell quickly, the ensuing Han empire tried to recreate a comparable order. Indeed, Emperor Wu (r. 141 to 87 BCE) largely recreated the Qin ritual system. This ritual system created for the First Emperor and consolidated by Emperor Wu underlined the claims of absolute sovereignty and endless empire. The ruler would circulate the entire realm, personally performing sacrifices at the sacred sites of each area. Having thereby personally embodied each of these sites, he would ascend a ritual altar. Each step of the altar would represent a new stage in the hierarchy of the pantheon. The second highest rung would be Heaven. The ruler would then move to the highest level, that of the Great One, after which the ruler would ascend to the heavens as an immortal.¹⁶

Clearly, one of the basic goals of the imperial ritual system (from the point of view of the emperor) was to break out of the religious practices of the day. As we

14. *Shiji*, “Qin Shihuang benji,” *Zhonghua shuju* edition, 6.245.

15. *Shiji*, “Qin Shihuang benji,” 6.236.

16. Puett 2008.

have seen, much of early Chinese religious practice can be defined as part of an endless attempt to domesticate capricious ghosts and spirits, transforming them into ancestors and gods who would work on behalf of the living. The attempts were endless because the process was never complete—the ancestors and gods would always revert to being capricious ghosts and spirits, and humans were thus in the position of constantly trying to domesticate them yet again.

With the system consolidated under Emperor Wu, appeals were made to the Great One, the deity who, as noted above, was claimed to be higher and more primordial than Heaven and to encompass all the other divine powers. The ruler would himself become divinized, become associated with the Great One, and gain direct power over the ghosts and spirits. The ruler would also become an immortal, and thus be autonomous from the ritual processes that would otherwise await him after death. The world would be unified under his power, and not under the endless domestication processes of the (nondivine) humans. Moreover, the inherent degeneration seen in the aristocratic system from the Bronze Age would be overcome: the decreasing potency of the lineages from the ancestral founders would cease to be a problem, since the rulers of the empire would be gods, and the empire could thus be made eternal.¹⁷

7. THE HUMAN MEDIATOR OF THE WORLD

This ritual system of divine kingship, invented under the First Emperor and consolidated under Emperor Wu, was enacted alongside a massive military expansion of the empire. By the first century before the Common Era, the empire was clearly overreaching its resources. As the imperial policies of the First Emperor and Emperor Wu were rejected, the ritual system associated with them was ultimately overthrown as well in the 30s BCE.¹⁸ The system put in place was presented as a return to the ritual system of the Bronze Age. The texts associated with Confucius were designated as the Five Classics, and the texts were interpreted as explicating the moral and ritual system of the Zhou.

Heaven, rather than the Great One, was once again posited as the highest deity. The ruler was clearly defined as human, and the sacrificial system was oriented not toward divinizing the ruler, but rather toward positioning the ruler properly with his ancestors and with Heaven and Earth.

Under this system, the ruler was deemed to be a Son of Heaven, rather than an august thearch. Moreover, the ruler's position as Son of Heaven was explicitly presented as a ritual relationship: there was no claim that Heaven had given birth to the ruler, or that he ruled by divine right. On the contrary, the ruler was

17. Puett 2002: 225–58 and 287–316; Puett 2008.

18. For the late Western Han ritual reform, see Loewe 1974; Kern 2001; Bujard 2000.

defined as a Son of Heaven purely in ritual terms: by providing the sacrifices to Heaven that a human would provide to his deceased father, the ruler would become, ritually speaking, the Son of Heaven, and he would be called upon as well to serve as the mother and father of the people. The people's familial dispositions would thus be extended to the ruler, who they would then follow as they would a parent, and the ruler's familial dispositions would be directed upward toward Heaven as his father and downward to the people as his children. The entire realm would thus come to function, again ritually speaking, as a single lineage.

One of the chapters of the *Book of Rites*, canonized during this period as one of the Five Classics, defines the creation as precisely one of domestication. The chapter presents Confucius as narrating how an original unity in distant antiquity was destroyed through the successive innovations of the sages—innovations that created a strong state, and so on, but at the loss of this earlier unity. Confucius is then presented as calling on the ruler to re-create this earlier unity by taking all these innovations and, through ritual, bringing them together into a constructed world—one in which all the participants come to think of themselves as part of a single lineage (which, of course, they are not). As Confucius is quoted as saying:

Therefore, as for the sage bearing to take all under Heaven as one family and take the central states as one person, it is not something done overtly. He necessarily knows their dispositions, opens up their sense of propriety, clarifies what they feel to be advantageous, and apprehends what they feel to be calamitous. Only then is he capable of enacting it.¹⁹

The chapter explicitly compares this ritual construction of the realm into a single family with the process of agricultural domestication. In the latter, a disparate set of phenomena (weeds growing out of the ground, rains, drought, warmth and cold coming at various times, etc.) are domesticated and transformed such that a full system of interaction is created that is directly beneficial to humanity. With ritual, one does the same: the ruler works with a disparate set of phenomena, including the various powers in the realm, the institutional innovations that he has inherited, and so on, and forges them in such a way that the realm functions, ideally, as a single family.

The ruler, then, would be the center, linking these constructed, ritual relationships of the different lineages and Heaven. Instead of the ruler coming to transcend everything and thus control it, the ruler on the contrary defines an order by becoming the center of a web of relationships (Heaven, Earth, the ancestors, and the populace) that he has constructed.²⁰

19. Liji, "Li yun," 9.22/62/5. For a fuller discussion of the chapter, see Puett 2010.

20. For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Puett 2008 and 2005.

These ritual relationships, moreover, could only be maintained if each lived up to the proper roles assigned: the ruler would be called on to behave like a Son of Heaven and to treat the populace as his children, the people would be called on to treat the ruler as their father and mother, and Heaven would be called on to treat the ruler as his son and the populace as his descendants. Such a model of human kingship is thus also associated with the dynastic cycle. The Son of Heaven should only reign as long as he successfully lives up to his role; his failure will mark the end of a dynasty and thus bring about a new one.

But, of course, this installation of a set of rituals modeled on the Zhou kingdom did not at all entail a rejection of the bureaucratic empire. It simply meant that the bureaucratic empire was presented, ritually speaking, as a patriarchal kingdom.²¹

Moreover, even the imperial title of august thearch continued to be used as well. The rulers of the Han could thus be called by either title (august thearch or Son of Heaven), and could take actions befitting either claim. Some rulers would play more the one or the other at different times and to different audiences, and different rulers would emphasize claims more of one or the other. I will return to this point below.

8. THE REVELATIONS OF THE GODS

By the second century of the Common Era, the Han court was losing power dramatically vis-à-vis the local aristocrats. As the empire began to break down, unrest began developing across the realm.

In 142, the One, also called the Way, took the human form of Laozi and handed down revelations to Zhang Daoling. Zhang Daoling created a movement—called the Celestial Masters—based on these teachings. The movement became strong enough to form an autonomous community in what is today Sichuan. At roughly the same time, another movement—called the Taiping (“Great Peace”)—formed in eastern China.

The revelations for these movements proclaimed the possibility of a coming apocalypse because of the improper behavior of humans. Among the key issues both movements singled out were the religious practices of the day—practices that were not domesticating the ghosts, but rather, they claimed, empowering them. Both movements also claimed that above the ghosts was a realm of gods who were actually noncapricious and good—and that humans should actually follow their dictates, rather than try to domesticate them and transform them. Both also proclaimed that the new order to be created would be a full meritocracy, and it would be one in which self-divinization would be open to the larger populace.

The arguments will be worth exploring in detail.

21. Compare Zhao and Eich's chapters in this volume, chapters 3 and 4.

8.1. *The Taiping Jing*

The *Taiping Jing* is a heterogeneous collection, but the earliest strata—those under consideration here—in all likelihood date to the late Eastern Han period.²² Whether the text was actually written within the Taiping movement is impossible to tell, but, regardless, the text provides a powerful example of a late Han apocalyptic text concerned with revelation and the ways to organize the political realm.²³

Let us again start with the dead, and the place of the dead in the world. The section of the *Taiping Jing* in question supports a generally Mohist vision of dealing with the dead. Heaven is posited as providing absolute guidelines for the amounts of sacrifice and offerings to be given. Since the behavior of all living creatures should be based on following the guidelines of Heaven, the *Taiping Jing*—like the Mohists before these precepts—opposed the use of sacrifice by humans to manipulate the spirit world. Doing so would disrupt the proper hierarchy set up by Heaven. The same guidelines held for mourning the deceased.

The *Taiping Jing* posits a cosmos in which all living beings, including the spirits, must play a cosmic role. Moreover, rewards and punishments are given according to the degree to which these beings follow the preordained commands.

As with the Mohists, the high deity for the *Taiping Jing* section under consideration is Heaven, and also as in the Mohists' belief, this high deity is neither capricious nor indifferent. The various spirits under the high deity are also neither capricious nor indifferent. On the contrary, the spirits are arranged in a pantheon by Heaven, and they serve to help Heaven nourish the myriad things. Their rank is dependent on the degree to which they succeed in this goal. The cosmos thus functions like a meritocratic bureaucracy:

In between Heaven and Earth, all of the spirits and essences must together help Heaven generate, nourish, and grow the twelve thousand things. Thus all of the spirits and essences fully obtain ranks and sustenance. This is like the myriad ministers and worthies who all help the emperor and kings nourish the people and myriad things; they all receive ranks and sustenance. Thus they follow Heaven as their model, always with the fifteenth day of the month a small report is sent up; at the beginning of the next month a medium report is sent up; and each year a large report.²⁴ Therefore those with great merit will receive promotion and those without merit will be sent away or punished.²⁵

22. For excellent studies of the *Taiping Jing*, see: Kaltenmark 1979; Xiong 1962; Petersen 1989, 1990a, and 1990b; and Hendrichske 1991 and 1992.

23. The *Taiping Jing* is an extremely heterogeneous collection. I will here be discussing those sections consisting of a dialogue between a Celestial Master and the Perfected. Most scholars agree that the content of this section seems to belong to a later Eastern Han context. See the helpful summary in Hendrichske 2000.

24. This refers to the reports sent up in a bureaucracy from the officials to their superiors. See the excellent discussion by Hendrichske 2010.

25. Ming 1992: 151.407–8. Here and throughout my translations have been helped immeasurably by those of Hendrichske 2007.

Heaven runs the pantheon of spirits as a meritocratic bureaucracy, promoting or punishing the spirits based on the degree of their support for the people.

The same principles underlie the fate of humans vis-à-vis the divine powers. Take ghosts, for example. For the *Taiping Jing*, one's fate in the afterlife is dependent on one's actions while alive. Being good and studying diligently while alive will bring one rewards in the afterlife: one will become a ghost who also roams joyously: "As such, hold fast to the good and study. Those who roam joyously to the utmost become ghosts who roam joyously."²⁶ The opposite is true as well. If one fails to behave properly while alive, one will become a dangerous ghost:

Those who exhaust themselves by bringing distress and bitterness to themselves become distressed and embittered ghosts. Those who exhaust themselves in vileness become vile ghosts. This is something that can clearly be seen. All humans are able to understand this, and yet none are willing to become good and make their *hun*-soul and spirit joyous. This is a truly severe transgression.²⁷

Ghosts are not inherently dangerous or capricious at all. The difference between good ghosts and dangerous ghosts simply comes down to what one did while alive. If one is good, studies hard, and thereby achieves a state of joyousness, one will be the same after death. And if one is the opposite, one will on the contrary become an embittered and vile ghost. Dangerous ghosts, in other words, are simply the consequence of bad behavior on the part of humans while alive. Again, it is a moral cosmos, in which bad things are the result of bad behavior.

And why have dangerous ghosts become so prominent in the world? It is part of the general decline of humanity:

When humans are born, they receive correct *qi* from Heaven and Earth, and the four seasons and five phases come to join as [the *qi*] becomes human beings. This was the ordered form of the former humans. Their bodily forms resided [properly] within Heaven and Earth, the four seasons, and the five phases. The bodies of the former humans were always joyous, good, and without anxieties, turning back to transmit more life. Later generations were unworthy. They have on the contrary long embittered the bodies of Heaven and Earth, the four seasons, and the five phases. This has caused them to be all the more resentful when they die, distressing their *hun* and *po* souls.²⁸

The world of popular religion, in which the dead became dangerous ghosts who had to be dealt with, was the result of a historical decline. In antiquity, humans

26. Ming 1992: 52.73.

27. Ming 1992: 52.73.

28. Ming 1992: 52.73.

lived properly and fit properly within the cosmos; their ghosts were equally joyous and turned back to help the living. It is only in the more recent generations that humans have become embittered, thus becoming after death embittered and dangerous ghosts.

The sages of the past understood this, and they therefore studied hard. Today, it is crucial that rulers follow this path, for only then will it be possible, considering the historical decline that has set in, for Great Peace to be achieved:

Therefore in antiquity the great worthies and sages, planning deeply and considering profoundly, understood that it was like this and did not stop studying. Those who are rulers take pleasure in thinking about the Great Peace and obtain the will of Heaven. Their merit is multiplied. Their *hun*-souls and spirits are able to roam endlessly in joy, connecting with Heaven's good energies.²⁹

So why has this decline occurred? For the authors of the *Taiping Jing* section under discussion, the decline is a result of a progressive accumulation of errors. The period at hand, which the authors term "late antiquity," is one in which these errors have become so extreme that the entire cosmos is in danger.

In high antiquity, those who obtained the Way and were able to bring peace to their rule did so only by nurturing themselves and holding fast to the root. In middle antiquity, there was some loss; they made small mistakes in nurturing themselves and lost the root. In late antiquity, plans were not auspicious, and they regarded their body lightly, saying they could obtain another one. Thus, they greatly lost it [the root], and they brought chaos to their rule. Although this was the case, it was not the fault of the men of later antiquity. It arose from the dangers of inherited burden.³⁰

The world of late antiquity is in such danger for the simple reason that it is so late: the errors of the past have accumulated such that those born in late antiquity have lost the Way dramatically. The text refers to this as inherited burden—the burden of living with the inheritance of the errors of previous generations.³¹

The Way has sent down the proper teachings, but humanity has, over the accumulation of small errors, increasingly strayed from the teachings:

The Way of the root is enduringly correct; it would not viciously deceive the people. But when humans have followed the teachings of the former men, rulers, teachers, and fathers, they have slightly lost this correctness. As they lose the correct sayings, they lose the correct way of nourishing themselves. They then learned by imitating each other. For those born

29. Ming 1992: 52.74.

30. Ming 1992: 37.61.

31. See the excellent discussion in Hendrichske 1991: 8–22.

later, it daily grew worse, and the result is this. It has been accumulating for a long time. They have been transmitting these teachings to each other, but never obtaining the truth. All under Heaven has become completely depraved, and no one is able to bring this to a stop. Therefore, disasters arise ten thousand times over—too many to be calculated. This all arose through accumulation over a long, long time. Ignorant people do not understand this, and they turn around and instead blame the rulers of their own time and accuse the people of their own time. How could this not make the sense of oppression form all the more? All under Heaven has become completely depraved, and no one is able to understand it on his own. Even if a ruler had the virtue of ten thousand men, how would he alone be able to do so? As such, with the conduct of today's men, how can there be a solution? . . . All of this provides complete proof of inherited burden. Turning around and blaming people of today just makes one unable to pacify one's rule. People of today have been transmitting and receiving depravities for so long; how would they be able to suddenly change and correct things on their own? They have been following along with a constant sense of oppression, and continuing in this way for a long time; Heaven pities them. Thus, the highest august Way responds to the primal *qi* and descends.³²

The authors assert strongly that the growing chaos is not the result of the divine powers being capricious or indifferent. All knowledge is divinely revealed, and that knowledge has been properly given. But humans have consistently made small errors, and these errors have accumulated such that it is now impossible for humans to correct the situation. Indeed, these errors have accumulated to the point that the entire cosmos is now in danger:

Heaven, Earth, and man, the three ranks, require one another in order to be established and form one another in order to be complete. This is like humans having a head, feet, and insides. If one of the ranks is destroyed, the three ranks in turn will altogether perish. This is like a man being without a head, feet, or insides. If there is one that is missing, all three are in trouble. Therefore, man's great way can destroy Heaven and Earth. When the three ranks are all destroyed, all will be dark, and the myriad things will accordingly perish. Now, when things are finished, they are not able to suddenly return to life.³³

This accumulation of errors has occurred more specifically in dealings with the dead. It is important in dealing with the dead to maintain a proper balance: the relation between the living and the dead should be like that between day and

32. Ming 1992: 37.59–60.

33. Ming 1992: 92.373.

night. The ghosts must be kept in their place, just as the night should not overtake the day. If on the contrary the ghosts are allowed to become too powerful, they will dramatically endanger the living:

Living humans are yang, ghosts and spirits are yin. Living humans belong to the day; dead humans belong to the night. You must understand the great significance of this. If the day grows longer, the night is made shorter; if the night grows longer, the day is made shorter. If the yang grows, it triumphs over the yin. The yin retreats, not daring recklessly to appear, and the ghosts and spirits go into hiding. If the yin grows, it triumphs over the yang. The yang retreats, and the ghosts and spirits can thus appear during the day. Now, living humans are associated with the sun, and evil ghostly creatures are associated with stars. The sun is yang, and the stars are yin. Thus, when the sun manifests itself, the stars flee; when the stars manifest themselves, the sun sets. Therefore, when yin triumphs, the ghostly creatures join together to create horrors so profound that no words can describe it. This is called the arising of the yin, and the decline of the yang. It causes rule and order to be lost and endangers the living.³⁴

Understanding the dangers of ghosts, the great sages of high antiquity therefore limited their sacrifices to the dead. They focused their hearts toward the dead, ensuring that only their own relatives would come for the offerings. They also gave to their deceased relatives no more food and drink than they had been given while alive, thus preventing the ghosts from becoming too powerful:

As for the ordering of the funerals by the sages of high antiquity, their hearts were directed toward it, and that was all. They did not dare to greatly increase them. Giving funerals to the dead is the most inauspicious activity under Heaven. Increasing inauspicious activities creates harm. Thus, the hearts [of the sages of antiquity] were directed toward it, and that was all. They did not go beyond providing for the dead the drink and food they provided when they were alive. Therefore at that time humans had much good fortune and no illnesses, and all completed their heavenly years [i.e., the life span allotted by Heaven].³⁵

In middle antiquity, the living began to increase the sacrifices to the dead, thus unintentionally empowering the ghosts. They also failed to direct their hearts to the rituals. The result of these errors is that many of the relatives of the living did not come to the sacrifices, but large numbers of other ghosts did. The ghosts would imbibe the sacrifices and then stay with the living, cursing them and making them sick:

34. Ming 1992: 46.50–51.

35. Ming 1992: 46.52.

As for the ordering of the funerals by those sending off the dead in middle antiquity, they partially lost the proper standard. They were unable specifically to direct their hearts toward it, and they lost the meaning. They on the contrary began to revere the dead and to put into practice the kinds of extravagance [for the dead] that in the end oppresses the living. Their hearts were only half-directed toward the dead, and only half of the ghosts of the dead [relatives] came to eat. The ordering of the funerals subtly deviated from the substance. They expanded the sacrifices, which at that time brought in the dangers. There was no way to know which ghosts and spiritual creatures were coming to eat the sacrifices, and [the ghosts] then remained to curse the living. Thus illnesses among the living little by little grew.³⁶

The living have been giving too many sacrifices to the dead, thus unintentionally empowering the ghosts.

In late antiquity (the period the authors believed themselves to be living in), this has reached a point of extreme danger:

Those in late antiquity have again inherited and carry on the small errors of middle antiquity, and they increasingly make them into ever greater errors.... When it comes to summoning the dead, ghosts are not able to come and eat constantly, and yet the sacrificial offerings were nonetheless greatly increased, thereby exceeding the proper standards. Yin grows and overcomes yang. No one knows which ghostly and spiritual creatures repeatedly come to gather together and eat, indulging themselves and having their way, acting like dangerous thieves and killing people without end. When they kill a person, [the ghosts] see an increase in the service [i.e., an increase in the sacrificial offerings] and see no punishments. Why should they not continue [killing the living] with all their strength? As a result, pernicious energies grow daily. It all turns back and attacks the giver of the sacrifices.³⁷

The living have been giving progressively more sacrifices to the dead, and the result of this is that the ghosts and spirits have become greatly empowered. It is not even that the ancestors of the living are coming to the sacrifices: the numbers are such that it is impossible to know who the ghosts and spirits are. They collect together to eat the sacrifices, indulge themselves, and kill the living—thus ensuring that yet more sacrificial offerings will be coming their way.

In other words, the very practices of the day—aimed at domesticating the dead through sacrifices—are precisely what is causing the problem the sacrifices were designed to solve: a cosmos populated by highly dangerous ghosts attacking

36. Ming 1992: 46.52–53.

37. Ming 1992: 46.53.

the living. Ghosts are therefore pervasive and at this point highly dangerous, but this is not an inherent part of the cosmos. Far from the cosmos being governed by dangerous ghosts and capricious or indifferent spirits, this section of the *Taiping Jing* asserts strongly that the cosmos is governed by entirely beneficent beings who have in fact given humans all the knowledge they possess. Moreover, the fact that dangerous ghosts exist is because the living have behaved badly—and this, of course, only proves that it is a moral cosmos. The reason things have become so dangerous now is that these errors have been accumulating over the past several millennia, and now the dangerous ghosts have accordingly been greatly empowered.

And how can the problem be solved? The text is clear that the problem cannot be solved by sending down yet another sage. This would simply re-create the same problem discussed above: errors would continue to accumulate and ultimately create yet a further danger. Accordingly, Heaven has now sent down instead a Celestial Master to give its revelations: “If they [Heaven and Earth] were to wish again to give birth to a sage, it would just be the same yet again. Heaven has been troubled for a long time. For this reason it sent me down to give its words as announcements to you, the Perfected.”³⁸ And what do these revelations consist of? Intriguingly, many of them involve an explicit attempt to prevent giving too much power to any one single authority—since this is part of what caused the gradual decline to begin with. Since proper teachings have been sent from Heaven, the key is to prevent considering any figure a perfect sage. On the contrary, the goal is to collect writings from all previous figures, and in their entirety, it is hoped, a single correct view will emerge:

If the sages of higher antiquity missed something, the sages of middle antiquity may have obtained it. If the sages of middle antiquity missed something, the sages of lower antiquity may have obtained it. If the sages of lower antiquity missed something, the sages of higher antiquity may have obtained it. If one has these follow one other by category and thereby supplement each other, then together they will form one good sagely statement.³⁹

And the same holds true for the living as well: since no one from the past can be granted full authority, no one in the present can as well: “Therefore, Heaven does not again make a sage speak, as he would be unable to fully eradicate all of the problems. Therefore, it makes all of the people under Heaven speak, and it makes them collect the ancient writings and study them.”⁴⁰ The entire political order is thus organized around a claim that no one figure should be granted too much

38. Ming 1992: 91.350.

39. Ming 1992: 132.352.

40. Ming 1992: 91.356.

authority. All true knowledge is divinely revealed, but no one figure—a sage or sage ruler—should be granted full authority in interpreting that divine knowledge.

The solution to the growing disaster is thus designed to prevent any one human from being granted the power to create a new order, or to be deemed a sage with any singular authority. The goal is to create a pure meritocracy, and one in which particular humans are no longer granted singular authority by being deemed sages.

8.2. *A Society of Transcendents: The Xiang'er Commentary to the Laozi*

Also during the late Han era, the *Xiang'er* commentary to the Laozi was written.⁴¹ The Celestial Masters would later accept the text as one of their own, and indeed even attribute the authorship of the *Xiang'er* commentary to Zhang Lu, the grandson of Zhang Daoling, who the Celestial Masters believed had received revelation from the god Laozi in 142 CE. Although it is impossible to know if this attribution is accurate, the fact that the text was either written within the Celestial Masters movement or at least appropriated by it renders it an invaluable work for our purposes.

Very much like the Mohists and the *Taiping Jing* section discussed above, the Celestial Masters asserted that there existed a high deity that was noncapricious and good. The Mohists and the *Taiping Jing* authors called this deity “Heaven,” while the Celestial Masters called it “Laozi,” the “Way,” or the “One.” As in the earlier self-divinization movements and early imperial ritual system, the Celestial Masters were making an appeal to a deity more primordial and more powerful than Heaven.

The *Xiang'er* commentary reads the *Laozi* as having been an earlier revelation from this One. This high deity ruled over a pantheon of spirits—including Heaven and Earth—that were also noncapricious and good. The pantheon rewarded good behavior among humans and punished bad behavior, so the cosmos was, for humans at least, fully moral: “Heaven and Earth model themselves on the Way. They are humane to those who do good, and inhumane to those who do bad. Therefore, when they bring to an end the badness of the myriad things, they do not love them but see them as grass and as dogs.”⁴² Humans were accordingly called on to follow the dictates of the high god and the pantheon of lesser gods, rather than trying to domesticate and transform the gods for the purposes of the living.

Unlike the Mohists and the *Taiping Jing* section, however, the Celestial Masters defined this pantheon as being above and superior to the ghosts of popular worship. Indeed, death itself was created by the Way as a punishment for bad

41. The *Xiang'er* commentary was discovered in Dunhuang (S 6825). It consists of commentary to chapters 3 through 37 of the Laozi. For outstanding studies of the *Xiang'er* commentary, see Rao 1991; Ōfuchi 1991; Bokenkamp 1993 and 1997; and Boltz 1982.

42. *Xiang'er*, lines 32–34.

behavior. If one follows the precepts of the Way, one will achieve long life and never become a ghost:

The Way established life in order to reward the good, and established death in order to punish the bad. As for death, this is what all men fear. The transcendent rulers and nobles, like the common people, know fear of death and enjoyment of life; it is what they practice that is different. . . . Although the common people fear death, they do not try to trust in the Way, and they enjoy committing bad acts. Is it surprising that they are not yet trying to escape from death? The transcendent nobles fear death, trust in the Way, and hold fast to the precepts. Therefore they join with life.⁴³

Those who follow the precepts of the Way enjoy long life. Those who fail to follow the precepts are called the vulgar. It is they who die:

The Great Yin is where the Way accumulates. It is the place that refines forms. As for the worthies: if the world has no place where they can reside, they feign death and pass into the Great Yin. They return to the other side and are reborn. They end but are not destroyed. The vulgar are unable to accumulate good deeds; when they die it is a true death. They are taken away by the earth officers.⁴⁴

The concern was not to domesticate ghosts and spirits and build a pantheon of ranked divinities: the spirits were already beneficent and already organized into a pantheon, and the ghosts were under the control of, and already being punished by, the earth officers of the Way. Thus, the Celestial Masters opposed the sacrificial practices that lay at the heart of the common religion of the day: "Those who practice the Way live; those who lose the Way die. The correct method of Heaven does not reside in sacrificing, praying, and offering. The Way therefore forbade sacrifices, prayers, and offerings."⁴⁵ The proper ordering of the world, therefore, was not dependent on a human domestication of the natural and divine realms, but rather a following of the beneficent precepts of the Way. Indeed, proper rulership consisted simply of following the Way and introducing the practices of the Way to the officials and populace below:

The ruler grasps the correct method and models himself on the great Way. All under Heaven returns to him. . . . As for the Way's transformation, it descends from on high. When it indicates the one to be called the ruler, it distinguishes the one man. In ruling there are not two rulers. That is why the thearchs and kings always practice the Way. Only thus will it reach the

43. *Xiang'er*, lines 299–303. Here and below, my translations of the *Xiang'er* commentary have been aided deeply by the superb translation given in Bokenkamp 1997: 78–148. I follow Bokenkamp in referencing the line number of the commentary as given in the photographic copy of the manuscript in Ōfuchi 1991: 421–34.

44. *Xiang'er*, lines 227–230.

45. *Xiang'er*, lines 374–5.

officials and people. It is not that only nobles of the Way can practice it, with the ruler being excluded. Rather, the great sage ruler follows the Way and fully puts it into practice so as to educate and transform. Once all under Heaven is thus ordered, the omens of Great Peace will accumulate in response to the merit of humans. The one who brings this about is a ruler of the Way.⁴⁶

If the theology of the text represents a reversal and rejection of the religious practices of the day, the cosmology does as well. As we saw above, one of the constant concerns underlying the practice was that ghosts and spirits became difficult (and increasingly so over time) to control after death occurred and they left the body. Hence the emergence of self-divinization techniques, in which one would avoid death, cultivate the spirit within oneself, transcend into the heavens, and get ever closer to the One. The *Xiang'er* reverses the cosmology. Not only is it the One that directs the process, but the One in fact created bodies (both the cosmos as a whole as well as human bodies at a microlevel) precisely in order to cultivate spirits. Moreover, it only did so reluctantly: “I” refers to the Way. Its desire is to be without a body. But it desires to nourish spirits. That is all. And it desires that humans model themselves on this.”⁴⁷ If the spirits are nurtured, the body (in this case, the cosmos) will also last long. And humans are called upon to model themselves on this, also using their bodies to accumulate essence and thus complete spirits: “The Way teaches humans to congeal essences and complete spirits.”⁴⁸ If humans follow these admonitions, then they will become transcendents and their bodies will live long:

Humans should only preserve their bodies; they should not love their bodies. What does this mean? By maintaining the admonitions of the Way, we accumulate goodness and complete accomplishments; accumulate essences and complete spirits. When spirits are completed, the transcendents live long. This is why we treasure our bodies.⁴⁹

But why was the Way’s creation of bodies reluctant? Because this creation has its dangers as well. With human bodies, the dangers are clear. Most humans will not use their bodies to cultivate spirits. They will on the contrary misuse their bodies, copulate too much, waste their essence, dissipate their spirit, and die. And since this is the case, the Way has to allow this copulation to create yet new bodies, so that hopefully some of them will be used properly. Thus, the Way also had to create, again reluctantly, not only bodies but also copulation, families, and even ancestral sacrifices for the dead:

46. *Xiang'er*, lines 527–33.

47. *Xiang'er*, lines 154–5.

48. *Xiang'er*, line 87.

49. *Xiang'er*, lines 161–3.

Now this [copulating to reproduce] produces great calamities. Why did the Way create it? The Way values ancestral sacrifices and values that the species does not end. It desires that humans join their essences and generate life; therefore [the Way] teaches it. . . . However, humans with utmost power . . . are able to not unite and produce life. From a young age they stop this [i.e., the losing of their essences through copulation] and they are able to complete good spirits earlier. These are called the essences of the Way. Thus, Heaven and Earth have no sacrifices, dragons no offspring, transcendents no wives, the Jade Maiden no husband.⁵⁰

The transcendents do not waste their essence through excessive copulation, but instead use it to complete spirits. Like Heaven and Earth, they become transcendents, become autonomous from family life, never die, and never give or receive sacrifices. In short, they become autonomous from the religious practices of the day.

But most humans fail to do this. Instead of completing their spirits and themselves becoming transcendent, they deplete their spirit and die; instead of helping the cosmos to last long, they instead do the opposite. This is why the entire cosmos is now in danger, and why the Way is giving more revelations.

It is clear how a society formed along the lines of these teachings would be organized. Just as the cosmos was a moral one, in which the good are rewarded and the bad punished, so would a community be based on the same principles. The hierarchy of the community would be based not on birth, but rather on merit, with merit being defined as the degree to which one was adhering to the dictates of the high god Laozi. The leader of the movement would simply be the one who has most fully followed these dictates. Those below would be promoted in the hierarchy based on the degree to which they successfully followed these precepts and cultivated themselves accordingly. The result would be a society of humans utilizing their bodies to cultivate spirits and thereby progressively helping to preserve the larger cosmos. The most successful of these would rise in the ranks of the community and ultimately become a transcendent.

The *Xiang'èr* has thus appropriated key elements of previous religious movements.⁵¹ Like the imperial system of the First Emperor and Emperor Wu, the *Xiang'èr* claims access to a higher deity than Heaven. Laozi is also called the “Way,” or the “One”—clearly related to the Great One worshipped under the imperial system. Moreover, Heaven is explicitly one of the spirits under the One. Also as in the imperial system, the adept will achieve transcendence. Thus, in the *Xiang'èr*, the goal was to achieve this same purity and this same autonomy from the domestication practices of the religions of the day as one sees in the early imperial system.

50. *Xiang'èr*, lines 57–63.

51. For a fuller discussion of the cosmology of the *Xiang'èr* commentary and the ways it was appropriating earlier materials, see Puett 2004.

But like the Mohists, the *Xiang'er* asserts that the cosmos is moral, guided by a moral high deity presiding over a pantheon of moral and noncapricious spirits. Thus, not only is the ruler achieving transcendence over the domestication practices of the day but those domestication practices are themselves posited as unnecessary and indeed destructive of the moral cosmos: the cosmos is ruled by spirits who do not consume sacrifices, and the world of sacrifice is part and parcel of the highly destructive activities of humans that are endangering the cosmos.

Accordingly, the techniques of self-divinization are not a product of human attempts to gain more power for themselves—to gain for humans (or those few humans who undertake the cultivation) powers that only the spirits above possess, or for the emperor, to gain a transcendence from the inherent dynastic decay built into the sacrificial system at the state level. On the contrary, the techniques of transcendence were a product of divine revelation from the One itself. Furthermore, following these revelations aids not just the adepts, but also the entire cosmos.

And society as well. Increasing degrees of divinization entail higher ranks in the social hierarchy, rather than a complete break from and power over the rest of society. And transcendence entails autonomy from the religious practices of sacrifice, but not autonomy from (or power over) the social world.

Perhaps most importantly, defining both the cosmos and the social world in the form of a moral, meritocratic system like that of the Mohists meant that, although the ruler continues to be a divine figure, the order below him is far more meritocratic than had been the case even at the height of the Western Han Empire. And the possibilities of divinization were thus granted to all on a purely meritocratic basis: anyone could undertake this divinization (the more the better), and doing so would grant one ever higher ranks in the social hierarchy.

The Celestial Masters, who accepted the *Xiang'er* as one of their texts, withdrew from the Han Empire to create an autonomous society.⁵² Meanwhile, the Han state successfully put down the Taiping rebellion in the east, but at such a cost and with such a yielding of power to the military that the Han state was weakened dramatically. The dynasty was overthrown in the early third century. The Celestial Masters gave their support to Cao Cao, whose son thereafter started the Wei Dynasty. The Celestial Masters became a major force in the Wei Dynasty.

9. ORGANIZING THE DEAD: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN EARLY CHINA

I have thus far explored several different models of political theology—of how to organize the social and political worlds, the worlds of the ghosts, and the worlds of the spirits.

52. On the Celestial Masters, see Ôfuchi 1991; Kleeman 1998 and 2007.

The first is based on a claim of radical creativity—a pure sage who breaks completely from the past and creates an entirely new order, who becomes the ancestor to the populace, who ultimately transcends Heaven and Earth and never dies. A claim, in short, of divine emperorship.

The second is a proclaimed ritual order, purportedly representing a return to the Bronze Age system of the Zhou as mediated by the texts put together by Confucius. In this system, the ruler is distinctly human, but is ideally the most cultivated human, connecting the various entities of the cosmic and social order in the form—ritually speaking—of a patriarchal lineage.

The third is from the millenarian movements, in which self-divinization reappears, but with calls for the full population to follow. Relatedly, calls are made for a more fully meritocratic form of governance. In the version seen in the *Taiping Jing* section discussed above, there is no single sage who is allowed to create a new order, nor is there even a body of texts from previous sages that are designated as authoritative. Rather, all innovation and accurate knowledge about how to build a proper order are posited as coming from Heaven, which is itself entirely good. The political order that will best reflect this pure realm above is one in which no one figure (either alive or dead) is granted too much power. Knowledge is obtained by having a free circulation of all ideas. In the version seen in the *Xiang'er*, there is indeed a clear set of teachings to be followed, but these teachings are ascribed to a high deity—the One. But here too the new order called for is a pure meritocracy, in which anyone, through self-cultivation, is capable of transcending the world of ghosts and becoming a transcendent.

The second of these political theologies, of course, is the one that we tend to associate with classical Chinese political order: the ruler as a Son of Heaven, presiding over a dynasty that gradually loses its potency over the generations, as the descendants become further and further removed from the ancestral founder.

But the other two continue to have an equally long history as well in China. First, the ritual system of divine emperorship developed by the First Emperor and consolidated by Emperor Wu would be appropriated by the later Daoist church, which would continue to perform versions of the rituals for the rulers.⁵³ And the claims of a ruler effecting a radical break with the past and creating an entirely new order continues as well in later Chinese history. Most famously, Mao Zedong explicitly compared himself to the First Emperor when he was attempting to wipe out what he called feudalism once and for all and give birth to a new society.

Moreover, the views we have seen playing out in the millenarian movements repeat themselves in later Chinese history as well.⁵⁴ Several dynasties would be

53. The ritual of the early Japanese state was based on this divine model of emperorship, rather than the humanistic son of Heaven model. For excellent studies of the early Japanese ritual system and its connections to China, see Ooms 2008; Como 2008 and 2009.

54. Ownby 1999.

brought down because of the emergence of millenarian movements, usually involving claims of divine revelations from a high and benevolent deity, calls for radical meritocracy, and proclamations concerning the divine potentials of all humans.

As we have already seen in the interplay of the Qin–early Han imperial system and the Celestial Masters, the first and third of these political theologies are mirror images of each other: both are based on claims for the creation of a radically new order, both involve claims for the transcendence of the practices of the day, and both involve claims of divinization. The primary difference is the degree to which these claims of divinization are opened to significant portions of humanity. The close interplay among these two political theologies helps to account for their historical connections—the fact that later Daoist ritual will build on the imperial ritual system, the fact that so many of the millenarian movements both help to bring about the end of a dynasty (in the case at hand, the Han) and help to bring about the rise of the next dynasty (in this case the Wei) through their support.

To help explore the implications of these political theologies, it will be helpful to return to the larger comparative context.

10. COMPARATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

In both Rome and China, claims of divine kingship emerged in direct connection with the rise of empire. In both cases, the concern was to assert a form of rulership that transcended both earlier forms of sovereignty and the religious practices within which those forms operated.⁵⁵ In part because these claims of divine rulership marked such a break from earlier forms of sovereignty, repeated efforts were also made to reassert claims of human sovereignty as well, and many of the complexities of the political theologies of the empires revolved around the competing claims of divine and human rulership vis-à-vis the religious practices of the day. Moreover, these claims of divine rulership, and the claims to transcendence that they involved, also helped to create the grounds for millenarian movements that would build on the claims of possible human divinization and try to expand such possibilities to the rest of the populace. These millenarian movements began in strong opposition to the empire, but in both Rome and China one of these movements (Christianity and Celestial Masters, respectively) was ultimately appropriated by the state and transformed into a new imperial ideology.

Not only are the religious and political visions that flourished in early China every bit as variegated as those that flourished in Rome, but they are in fact

55. On the divinization of the Roman emperors, see Taylor 1931; Pollini 1990; Weinstock 1971; Yavetz 1983; and Zanker 1988.

extremely comparable, emerging for comparable reasons and under comparable circumstances.

But allow me to return momentarily to the contrast, mentioned earlier, that is often made about the different legacies that would appear to be left to Europe and China respectively from these two empires. A legacy of republic-monarchy-empire on the one hand, and monarchy, or perhaps imperial-monarchy, on the other. Given the striking similarities, how are we to account for the different legacies that the two empires appear to leave?

The first point to emphasize is that the contrast is empirically incorrect. As I have already noted, the legacy of what was above termed the first and third political theologies was to be appropriated constantly by later movements. But it is certainly true that the second of these political theologies (the one developed in the ritual reforms of the 30s BCE) would be picked up repeatedly by later dynasties, and this is why we tend to associate it with Chinese political theory in general—a Son of Heaven ruling as a dynastic monarch, mediating Heaven and Earth and connecting the different elements of the realm.

Indeed, when the Tang successfully re-created a full empire in China in the seventh century, they modeled their ritual system on a variant of that which was developed in the 30s BCE. While re-creating the Qin-early Han imperial system, and also actively supporting the Daoist church, the Tang ruler also made the ritual claim to be a Son of Heaven, mediating between Heaven and Earth, connecting the realm, and continuing the dynastic tradition of the Bronze Age.⁵⁶ While what I have termed the first and third (in its institutionalized, nonrevolutionary form) political theologies were fully present, the dominant public rituals were very much based on the second vision.

And, politically speaking, this was a wise choice. As we have seen, the vision that underlay the 30s BCE ritual reform was hardly based on an assumption of a harmonious cosmos. The attempts by recent scholars to characterize it as such, rather than as a claim within a complex debate, has resulted in it being misconstrued. On the contrary, the claim of this position is precisely that the world is *not* inherently harmonious, or inherently linked at all. Heaven and Earth are indifferent, the spirits are capricious, and the populace divided into different lineages competing for power. But all of these are domesticated through ritual, and all come to be defined as linked into a single lineage, with the ruler as the center of the familial network. Far from its being an assumption, we should read the claim of the ruler being a Son of Heaven, unifying the cosmic and political realms into a single lineage, as being a ritual statement: how things should operate if the world really functioned according to the ritual—which, of course, it does not. Reading it as an assumption is to take a ritual statement and read it as a view of the cosmos as it really is.

56. See Wechsler 1985; McMullen 1987.

The point must be emphasized for several reasons. To begin with, the ritual reform was a very successful appropriation of the religious practices of the day, which helps to explain part of its cultural resonance and success. In contrast, both the divine emperorship model and the millenarian movements depend for their power on a rejection of the practices of the day, a fact that helps to explain why they tend to appear historically with tremendous power, but also to be less popular over the long term.

Second, the ritual basis of the order helps to explain part of its malleability. Since the ruler is called on to create a successful order by harmonizing all that exists, it also means that any new set of institutions or practices that arise can and must be dealt with by the ruler. Thus, to give a significant example, meritocracy—so strongly pushed by the Mohists and later by the millenarian movements—later comes to be an increasingly significant component of the imperial state as overseen by a Son of Heaven.

In short, the claim was not that the world is inherently harmonious and that the ruler accords with that larger harmony. The claim, building on the religious practices of the day, is that the ruler must domesticate and transform all that exists such that a harmonious order of constructed familial relationships can be built. The political theology that resulted was an extraordinarily supple one for domesticating innovations and, indeed, just about anything that came from the outside. The result was in a sense an endless balancing act, trying to contain claims of divine emperorship and meritocracy within a claim of human kingship modeled on that of the Bronze Age monarchies. Ultimately, it would prove to be an extraordinarily successful imperial ideology.

In this set of debates concerning political and religious order in early China and ancient Rome, the parallels between earlier monarchical notions, the emergence of divine claims to emperorship, and the development of millenarian movements have been striking. And equally striking are some of the very different legacies that these competing orders have left.

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